THE BOOKMAN

Edited by Seward Collins

FEBRUARY, 1931 VOL. LXXII; NO. 6

AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND THE NOVEL

by Storm Jameson

THE course of English fiction has been described so often as a stream that I ought to apologize for inviting anyone, at this late day, to revisit it. The banks have been trodden nearly bare and the scenery is as familiar as the path. But perhaps, if we can arrive at a point a little in advance of the track, we may stumble on a new prospect or, if that is too much to hope, see the old one from a different angle.

This stream, now. It has always had a double current. Sometimes the two have flowed side by side, nearly separate and distinct; at times they mingle; at others, again, one current has swelled and spread out, forcing the other to flow beneath the surface of the stream, nearly unheeded. Of these two, the novel of character has perhaps never been better than second favorite in our hearts. On the whole we have preferred the novel in which the stress has fallen on action—action sometimes quite irrelevant to character, a pell-mell of scenes and incidents set down mainly for their own sake, because they are interesting or impressive or typical of idiosyncrasy or comic. Pamela and Clarissa may wring withers in their day but a later day views them with horror or mirth. But Tom Jones retains his hold on our affection not for his rascally self but because the fields and copses in which he found good hunting —it might be a hare or a buxom young woman—and the streets through which he walked, brawling or laughing or staring, are still part of our consciousness. It is always the same. For one priggish and peculiar person who really prefers Thackeray—I confess to you that I am one of these—there are at least ten to whom the rich spread of Dickens is a sufficient feast. Why not? It is right that it should be so—since the English have always been less concerned with the springs of action than with the action itself and what came of it. We like better to watch a man reveal his soul in doing than to listen while he unpacks it in thoughts and words. So much so that it is nearly impossible to find a novel which is all character to set beside one which is all action. Even the Man of Feeling is not without his precise moments. It is

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—if I may vary the figure with which I began—in the traditional novel only a question of stress. In Thackeray the stress falls on the development of character, but this is not to say that nothing ever happens to Clive Newcome and Pendennis. All manner of things happen to them; yet what interests us is less what they are doing than what they are becoming and the splendid social panorama in which they move. In Dickens the stress falls naturally on the events, which follow each other in a lively and unparalleled profusion. His characters are either fully developed and labelled—by some trick of speech or gesture—when we first meet them, or they remain forever young and undeveloped. Under all the knocks and turns of his fate Mr. Micawber keeps his label. And David Copperfield when we leave him is still the little boy who admired Steerforth and let the waiter do him out of his half-pint of ale and chops. Put crudely, Dickens was more interested in characters and incident and Thackeray in character and scene, and both of them packed into their novels all kinds of additional bits and pieces, philosophic reflections, social satire, moral purposes, anything they had by them at the time, and both are in the tradition, swimming along with the main stream of English fiction, which runs clear out of the eighteenth century—its remoter springs need not trouble us—to this day and moment.

The real thing about any novel in the tradition—whether you call it a novel of character or of events, Jane Austen or Captain Marryat—is that it is a fairy story of real life. It must have nothing of the inconclusive and unsatisfying aspect of actual life, which neither begins nor ends and is perpetually defeating mere human logic. It begins and ends, it obeys a logic of its own, its characters are decisively rounded off, married or buried or what not. The sum of it is either satisfaction at the sight of happiness suitably bestowed, or an understanding, momentary if you like, of the tragic sense of life. The fairy tale need not end happily to give satisfaction. Tess dies. So, to compare small things with great, does Tessa in *The Constant Nymph*. We have derived pleasure from our meeting with them although the end has been tragic—or pitiful. Both heroines, the Victorian and the modern one, have satisfied some hunger in us. What the nature of this hunger is and what—besides fairy stories—can satisfy it, and why fairy stories do, and whether the appetite is constant, are questions beyond the moment.

There has always been the main stream and there have always been neglected backwaters and tributary streams, some of these mere trickles lost in the sand and others that are broad shining rivers. We northerners love classifying and arranging and labelling, so let us fix names to the broadest of these streams. They have, you will remember as we go, a double importance for us, since not only are they perpetually feeding and enriching the main stream but it is easy to imagine a day and a circumstance in which one or the other of them might comfort a world that has grown tired of fairy tales. A world I shall not see and do not care over-much to think of.

While I run here and there, pointing and labelling, you will not forget that, however freakish it is, a novel must have some qualities that belong to the tradition. It need not tell a story, and its characters may be mere pegs or gestures, but it must have *some* recognizable characters and they must do or think or feel something—even if at the end of the book you are left wondering what it could have been. A novel of ideas does not consist only of ideas: if it did it would not be a novel at all. And some novelists who imagine themselves to be more passionately concerned with their ideas than with events or characters are overridden by their good genius and compelled against their will to create living characters. It cannot be more than a month since I read *The Autocracy of Mr. Parham* and agreed fervently with Mr.

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Wells's views. But what remains with me is not any one of those estimable doctrines but the figure of Sir Bussy Woodcock saying "Gaw" to the noblest shibboleths of history.

Still there is a perfectly recognizable kind of book, which we can call, if we like, the novel of ideas. Under this head come all those novels which were written not because their author was compelled to describe the events that befell certain men and women and what came of them but because he was compelled by certain ideas or faiths or merely by certain indignations that possessed themselves of his imagination. His novel becomes a vehicle for the passions of his mind and heart, and only in the second place a comedy or a tragedy reflecting or revealing life through the medium of a story about what happened next. The fairy-tale element is thus weakened or destroyed, and this accounts, partly, for the comparative unpopularity of the novel of ideas. Ideas—until they have been born again in action—are dry fare. If they are significant enough the novel will get its public, but it will be a small public compared with the public that is always waiting for a good enough fairy story, for *The Constant Nymph* and *The Good Companions*.

The two modern masters of this kind are Mr. Aldous Huxley and D. H. Lawrence. Mr. Huxley creates characters. Few of his people are pleasant and some of them are mere gestures of his devouring indignations. His range is extremely limited, since he rarely moves beyond a narrow highly-educated society which contains at least one modern scientist, one artist, writer, critic, painter or what not, and one promiscuous young woman. The same characters appear again and again in his books, under different names and shapes. This has the curious effect of making them less rather than more real. The finest thing he has ever written concerns a character—Uncle Spencer—who does not fit into this gallery of familiar portraits. The conversation has all the point and ripeness of conversations we imagine taking place on the Chelsea side of Parnassus. It is—to borrow a theatrical term—all fat. The same dislikes, the same speculations, the same loathings bob up again and again. Mr. Huxley has a great deal of heart, a wry humor and a Dickensian eye for grotesques. What gives his novels their peculiar flavor and justifies us in thrusting them into the pigeon-hole labelled Novel of Ideas is the fact that all these admirable qualities of his can only get out by one door. They all have to squeeze their way past his tyrant intellect. Every genuine emotion that shows its head is seized upon by this subtle monster, questioned, bullied, its word doubted, and finally sent upon its way in so flattened and chastened a mood that it is never good for much again. When his intellect is not draining his real emotions of life it is inventing others to torment him. He is nothing if not a thinker. He can think himself into anything and it is only by thinking that he becomes anything. In a recent book of essays he erects a working philosophy which he labels life worship. The life worshipper, he says "is at one moment a positivist and at another a mystic: now haunted by the thought of death . . . and now a Dionysian child of nature". No man, by taking thought, can become a child of nature, even for five minutes. Mr. Huxley's mind is at its old tricks with him.

With such a mind, cultured, tortuous, sceptical almost against his will, self-mocking and self-tormenting, with all his other gifts of humor, irony, and sharp if limited observation, it would be surprising if his novels were other than they are, the ripe and rather acid fruit of a mind which is as incapable of falling below a certain level of accomplishment as it is of forgetting itself.

D. H. Lawrence was ridden not by ideas but by an idea, a faith—if you like—a religion. He would have known just what was biting Mr. Huxley. He perceived and hated the modern disease of mind—mind divorced from feeling, mind pouring its sands over

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the instinctual sources of life, drying them up, sealing them. He believed—and no doubt he is right—that a man or a nation or a civilization which has forgotten how to draw on the deep unreasoned sources of its being is dying. The time came, all too soon, when this passionate belief of his, and his struggles to find words for the profoundest and least expressible of feelings, began to cloud his work. He had almost every gift of the novelist—sympathy, observation, the story-teller's magic. The men and women in his earliest books are human beings, deeply observed and known. *Sons and Lovers* is one of the finest novels of our age. No modern novelist could create character more surely and richly. From the very first he was master of an admirable narrative style—vivid, nervous, and concrete. And no more able than any other could have been to reduce the terrific emotions of the unconscious within the form of a novel. He drags them up and there they lie, deep-sea monsters, gasping and quivering, dwarfing into unreality the merely human characters of his books. He is the best witness I could produce before you to the truth that the *first* business of a novelist is with the deeds and destinies of men and women. He may enrich his novel with every other kind of interest, but if he has neglected that one essential duty, or pushed it into the second place, he has written for the few. For the elect, if you like. It does not signify. No novelist ever *chose* to write only for the elect. He was driven to that lonely honor by some lack in him, of sympathy or comprehension. Or by an obsession. Mr. Huxley cannot, D. H. Lawrence could not, help himself.

Ideas and creeds are not the only things that distract a novelist from his duty, or console him for his innate inability to fulfil it—which is it? A too passionate interest in the *way* he is writing will draw off his energies just as fatally. Would he allow them to be distracted in this way if he were really possessed by his subject? Possibly not. Not one of the great novelists has ever taken more trouble over his writing than was necessary to make it move. The important thing, for Fielding and Scott, Dickens and Thackeray, was to tell what happened, to explain this event or that person, not to make experiments in style. I hesitate to suggest that it would be impossible for a novelist to write a novel of the major importance of *Henry Esmond* with the exquisite attention to the rhythm of words and phrases given by Virginia Woolf to her *Mrs. Dalloway*. All one can say is that it has not yet happened. There is *Ulysses*, of course—but though *Ulysses* is a monument of industry and art (like the Albert Memorial) and a notable experiment in method I am not sure that it ought to be considered as a novel. Leaving Mr. Joyce suspended between fiction and the epic, let us put it that no novelist has ever yet written a book on the scale of *War and Peace* in a style one tenth so rich in subtle beauties as the style of *Orlando* and *To the Lighthouse*. So far as the history of fiction goes it is scarcely rash to venture that a preoccupation with the subtleties of style has only once been found in company with the superabundant vitality which produces great novels. The one instance is not absolutely four-square. Even with *Tristram Shandy* I do not feel that Sterne actually cared *more* about his style than about the characters of Walter Shandy, Uncle Toby and his Corporal Trim, and Pastor Yorick. I do feel that the chief preoccupation of Mrs. Virginia Woolf is less with what she writes than with how she writes it. All her gifts, of humor, insight, and perception, are bent this way first. If she had had a greater vitality—she has indeed not much—would she have been able to hold it down to this delicate work, or would it have run away with her and produced great novels instead of charming ones? I don't know. When she wrote *The Voyage Out* she was less absorbed in the intricacies of prose rhythm than when she wrote *Orlando*. *Orlando* is a splendid piece of prose writing. *The Voyage Out* is a very fine novel.

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It does not seem to matter what the gifts are that a novelist offers us in place of a well-rounded story of men and women loving, hating, laughing, enduring, and striving, he is doomed to comparative failure. Nothing will do but the story. There is a school of novel-writing which concerns itself primarily with what it calls real life. Disdaining the fairy-story element which is common to all the great novels, from *Henry Esmond* to *War and Peace*, this school sets out to tell the truth about life—not to explain life, not to make a story of it, not to show it, but to show it up. This impulse has produced some grim pieces of writing which have merit—but it is not a literary merit. The truth about life is that it is unbearable and that we bear it. The process of bearing it wrings from us tears, laughter, and impulses of extraordinary complexity, meanness and nobility. Nothing of all this gets into the novels of the life-as-it-is school except the meanness and the tears. In the end they are little better than inverted or perverted fairy stories, written not to amuse but to remove the scales from our eyes, to instruct. This is really what damns them. The first duty of an artist—novelist, poet, what you like—is to give pleasure. Schoolmasters and moralists instruct. Artists please—or should. If they instruct too, it is by the way. No novelist whose *first* object is instruction, the showing-up of life, can succeed as a novelist. The novelist can show life up if he likes and as much as he likes—but only on condition that he first shows it. In all its richness, its irony, its terror, and its infinite variety.

There are more kinds of novels—outside the tradition—than we have labels for, and more than are worth labelling. Let us hurry across a wide territory, dotted with objects of interest to curio hunters, and come directly to the latest development: the enormous interest shown in recent years in biography and autobiography. Few novels have been more successful than Mr. Lytton Strachey's life of Queen Victoria and Mr. Robert Graves's life of himself. At first sight this seems a flat contradiction of everything I have said about the popular affection for fairy stories. If it happened, it is not a fairy story. How explain the almost simultaneous success of *Goodbye To All That* and *The Good Companions*? There is only one probable explanation, and that is that the appetite for fairy stories has all along been an appetite for something else. Fairy stories contain what will satisfy it. So do genuine autobiographies. And now I must venture my head on a definition of this appetite which swallows Mr. Graves and Mr. Priestley in one mouthful.

There are certain things to be said before I rush in where a wiser man would hesitate. One concerns the modern biography. It is actually a less striking instance of the emergence of a new taste than the autobiography. In form it approximates to the novel. It can be read as a novel, and no doubt often is. Queen Elizabeth is an historical character, but as portrayed by Mr. Lytton Strachey in *Elizabeth and Essex* there is very little in degree and nothing in kind to distinguish her from the heroine of any psychological romance. In fact, as soon as a writer of biography abandons his documents and indulges in what is charitably called a reconstruction of his subject's thoughts and feelings, basing it not on documents but on an application of the general principles of psychology or psycho-analysis, he ceases to be a biographer and becomes a romancer, a novelist. His success—when he is successful—with his public is due very little to any historical merit his work may have. Some modern biographies have remarkably little. It is due partly to a natural human curiosity about other people—what was Queen Victoria really like?—but mainly to the author's skill in telling a story and imagining a character; to his skill as a novelist, in short.

We are on quite different ground with autobiography. Here, too, no doubt, curiosity accounts for a fair proportion of readers. We rush to read Mr. Robert Graves's book very

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much in the spirit with which our ancestors grasped at the ballads offered for sale under the gallows at Tyburn—the highwayman's last confession. But there is more in it than that. Remember that Mr. Graves is not writing a fairy story. He is telling the truth about himself and his life. So he says and we believe him. In the second place, Mr. Graves is not a great figure. To the general public he must—before the appearance of *Goodbye To All That*—have been quite unknown. Anyone might feel: "How I should like to know what Queen Victoria really felt about Mr. Disraeli". But no one except his friends—and he had probably already told them—could have been saying: "How I should like to know what Mr. Robert Graves felt when he went to school and when he got married". Yet all these thousands of persons who have never heard of him fall over one another to procure copies of his book and read it and, we may suppose, enjoy it, for it has many qualities. If it had been a novel and published as a novel it would scarcely have had a success. It is not a taking novel. We are forced to conclude that it was read by so many people precisely because it was *not* a fairy story, but a true relation of the life, to his thirtieth year, of one obscure young poet. Why? What hunger, apart from what can have been only the mildest curiosity, did it satisfy in them?

We have not come suddenly to the modern craze for autobiography, though, like so many other growths, it has been hastened in the forcing house of the War. There are the historical instances. And over a long period the novels written by clever young men and women have become increasingly autobiographical in content. This is not the same thing as saying that a novelist draws on his own thoughts, feelings and experience for his books. On what else could he draw? He may even put as much of himself into a book as Dickens put into *David Copperfield* and yet escape the charge of writing a disguised autobiography. In David Copperfield Dickens created a character which stands on its own legs and has its own real and separate existence in the world of literature, as real, in the same kind real, as Tess or Lear or Falstaff. The autobiographical novels of our young Parnassians have never, so to speak, severed the umbilical cord that relates them to their authors. They do not stand four-square. They remind one of that dreadful stuff, ectoplasm, emitted by certain mediums in conditions of trance. They have no independent existence, no principle of life.

I should be doing Mr. Graves an injustice if I implied that his book bore a resemblance to these ectoplasmic little novels. It does not. But our minds have been prepared for such books as his, for a burst of frank and undisguised self-portraiture, by a cloud of little books in which the self-portrait is thinly veiled, and by one big book—Proust's long novel. This is not the time for a discussion of Proust's work. It is enough if I recall that this writer sets out to recover—by a method he takes pains to explain—the experiences, physical, mental, and emotional, of his past, and that the process reveals an indiscriminate pile of objects, like the contents of a rifled tomb, some beautiful, others repulsive and others merely valueless.

It is clear that we are in the presence of a natural force. All this autobiography is not an induced growth. It was coming of itself before the War, by flooding men's minds with an experience too vast to be readily translated into fiction, made it inevitable. There are any number of attendant circumstances. One of them is the gradual dissolution of habits of personal reserve and dignity. This began long before the War. The War was only the last and fiercest solvent. When it was over we found that we had been made bankrupt for an incredible number of the most superb sentiments. We had, so to speak, kept them in hand during a long rainy day, only to find when it was all over that their purchasing power had dropped to nothing. We have distrusted

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superb sentiments ever since. We are no longer much impressed by final gestures. The sight of one of our friends taking up a dignified attitude does not fill us with respect. It only makes us think him an ass, an amusing or (oftener) a boring ass. In the same way we prefer to look through our legs at the heroic and the noble. We like them better from that angle. The modern spirit wears a grinning mask and respects nothing very firmly. There is therefore little to discourage a writer from making public any and every detail of his personal life that seems to him important. And nothing in the spectacle to shock a modern mind. All things considered, why should we be shocked? The War was followed by the Peace and we have outlived both. Nor is any published autobiography so shocking, in the narrow sense of the word, as some of the scenes and jokes in any successful revue. No. What is surprising about *Goodbye To All That* is not the impulse that made Mr. Graves take us into his confidence about himself and his war and his marriage, and not the fact that his gesture fails to shock us, but the fact that some thousands of us found the book as interesting, exciting, and satisfying as, let us say, the last novel by Mr. Bennett. That is really significant.

The finest achievement of modern autobiography, and the one that excuses and (you may say) sanctifies any others, is the war book proper. Here again it is not strange that a writer who survived the War should feel that his experience was too tremendous and too crushing to be recast in the form of fiction. It is not surprising if he feels that what happened—to him and others—was in itself so significant that it should be put down exactly as it happened, without alteration of tone or shape or color. If he feels, in short, that nothing can do justice to the War except an accurate recollection of his experience. None of this is strange; though *War and Peace* stands up to testify that it is possible to write a great war book in the form of fiction. What is strange is the involuntary testimony of critics and readers to the feeling that, compared with a truthful war book, a war novel belongs to an inferior order of literature. This feeling has nothing whatever to do with the fact—indisputable—that no war novel yet written is of the quality of *Undertones of War* or *The Middle Parts of Fortune* or Herbert Read's brief account of the retreat of March, 1918. So strong is the feeling that even when a war book is written ostensibly as a novel we refuse to be put off by appearances. It is natural and easy enough to read for "George Sherston" Siegfried Sassoon, but *The Middle Parts of Fortune* was surely meant to be read as a novel. Yet so anxious are we to justify it as literature that we say: "Of course, Bourne is Manning himself". Mr. Squire, reviewing the *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* in the *Observer*, makes a special merit of the fact that the book has not undergone what he calls "artificial sorting". Yet it used to be supposed that the whole duty of the artist toward his material was to sort and arrange and re-create it. Why this change of attitude? Is it only that we regard the War as an event, an experience, too special to be tampered with by art? That of itself is a new and sufficiently striking doctrine in criticism. But perhaps it is something more. Perhaps it is not only in the mind of writer and critic that truth begins to seem not merely stranger but more valuable and more satisfying than fiction? These veracious recitals—of war as one man saw it, of life as one man has lived it—do they satisfy an appetite which until now has felt itself fully fed by fairy stories only because nothing else was offered?

The value of these war books is outside the question and indeed past question. I am inclined to believe that the only literature of value left by my generation will be its war books. None of the younger novelists, not even Mr. Priestley or Mr. Huxley, has written a novel which—regarded as literature—is in the class of *Undertones of War, The Middle Parts of Fortune*, and Herbert Read's

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two short books, *In Retreat* and *Ambush*. Certain books on a lower level than theirs—I instance *Medal Without Bar* (a novel) and *A Subaltern's Diary* (not a novel)—were infinitely more worth-while writing than certain other post-war books which have achieved vast success. All these books have a quality in common. Some are written with a fine and deliberate feeling for prose style, others are simple narratives or diaries. And all of them record not merely the actual experiences of their writers but the events of that period in their lives when they were most sharply and consciously alive. Nothing that has happened since the War is so real to these men as it was and is. These memories are real. These memories, with a few thoughts and dreams of that time, are all they have to leave of themselves which is real.

And now I cannot any longer avoid grappling with the question: What is this appetite that swallows me a Priestley, a Blunden, and a Graves with equal zest? And, nearer home, what will become of the fairy story with this young dangerous rival competing for favor and place? For the moment nothing. The fairy story still charms and satisfies, as witness the instant success of *The Good Companions*. That does not make less significant the fact that the other books, the true stories, are being read and in increasing numbers written. A tiny instance caught my eye this morning. If, some years ago, a young Mr. Waugh had gone on a Mediterranean trip he would have worked his experiences into a novel. It would never have occurred to him that anyone beyond his nearest friends would be interested in his merely personal adventures and reflections. Today he does not hesitate to publish just these and to expect and to receive the notice of critics and the attention of a not negligible public. The instance, like the book, is trivial but it has a point.

All evidence I should need to offer other than a different answer to my questions is not in my hands. I do not know, for instance, whether the same person or the same sort of person is reading Sassoon and Priestley. I do not know whether age, or sex, has anything to do with a preference for one over the other. But what is clear enough is that Mr. Graves and Mr. Sassoon are both, in their degree, satisfying a hunger and a need. What, then, is this hunger?

It can, I think, be no other than the hunger for life and more life, which has supped full of fairy tales from Defoe to the latest popular novel, and is now flinging itself eagerly on newer fare. Biography and autobiography, the true story of Queen Victoria and the true story of Mr. Sassoon, it is all one to George Smith and Mary Smith, who have never yet had the chance to live that rich splendid exciting life they might have lived—if things had been different, if times had changed, if a miracle had some time happened. All their dreams and their vague inarticulate desires, an uncharted country behind the narrow road that stretches between being born Mary Robinson and dying Mary Smith, are released in them when they can get a glimpse into other people's lives, into the life of Elizabeth Bennet, Becky Sharp, David Copperfield, Jane Eyre, Lorna Doone, Soames Forsyte, Kipps, and Mr. Polly. Until just now fiction was the one and only gate by which the common man could slip beyond the narrow limits of his own world, into a world peopled by all the strange, the passionately interesting creations of the novelist. The older biographies were no use to him. They were as dull and discreet as tombstones, giving nothing away. Nothing to feed a hungry mind and starved desires. Now to the characters of fiction and to its myriad imagined worlds are being added characters from the actual world, obligingly self-confessed.

I imagine that we are only at the beginning, the first springs, of autobiographical literature. The small trickle will swell and broaden and take on all the characteristics of a main stream. There is no reason why, once a man has begun to write about himself, he

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should not go on doing it for a very long time. Marcel Proust spent the whole of his writing life on his autobiography. Mr. Sassoon has already published two books and so has Mr. Graves. Why not? Neither of the English writers has plunged as deep into himself as Proust did. Compared with his, their self-portraits are mere sketches, a superficial scratching of the ground. We learn less about Mr. Graves, for all his candor, than Mr. Strachey tells us about Elizabeth. On the other hand, in one case we have the subject's word for what we learn and in the other we have only Mr. Strachey's. We know now that every strange, terrible, and fantastic force in the world round us has its parallel in the world within. We have devoted centuries to the exploration of the outer world. The inner world lies all before us, a new Eden, through which to take our solitary way. Impossible to foresee, with any degree of comfort, the literature that will spring from this nearly untapped source. Certainly it will have a profound and disturbing effect on fiction proper: some novelists will react violently against it—I imagine a later Priestley battling desperately against the temptation to look within for riches; others will put themselves to school there, and from exploring their own hearts and minds with an unashamed thoroughness will develop a new and perhaps startling conception of character. Incidentally, seen from this angle, *Ulysses* becomes a portent of another kind. One way or other, the effect on novelists of the new departure will be profound.

And perhaps, after all, there is nothing new in our appetite for these true narratives and accounts. If you are reading stories to a child as like as not he will cry when you end: Is it true? Did it happen? Later, he begins to understand that the stories he reads in books have never happened, and his mind accepts uncomplaining the miracle of "as if". The successful novelist writes *as if* what he wrote about had really happened, and the mind of the common man performs, without knowing it, the other half of the miracle. The fairy story comes to life. But what if it were really true? That would be something different—satisfying and exciting in a different way. When a Mr. Lytton Strachey promises to tell us the truth about Queen Victoria and a Mr. Graves to tell us truthfully about himself we crowd round to listen. It is still a story, this time true.

But suppose the written word were nothing but a compensation, something we thought of to fill out the shortness and poorness of our lives? To be sure, that "nothing but" includes all romance, all beauty, all strangeness. Yet for all that it may be that life needs only to become as full, rich, and free for the many as it now is for the few, and the whole lovely glittering world of fiction, with its Rosalinds and its Tesses, its Clive Newcomes and its Sam Wellers, will vanish like the ragged edges of a dream when the dreamer wakes. And no one will have time or interest to listen when a Mr. So-and-so unpacks his soul in words and a Miss Such-an-one tells the whole world what she would once have whispered to a friend or kept secret. Perhaps literature is a child which is bred in hardness and nursed by illusion. Perhaps we do not dream except when we are unhappy. The race of man has been only a little time on earth. It is still early. When the sun is fully up man may have forgotten that it used to be pleasant to listen to tales and fairy stories. But by then this room will be less substantial than Childe Roland's tower and we ourselves no more real than Hamlet. And what case the world may be in without fairy tales will not trouble us.

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ITALO SVEVO

by Justin O'Brien

ITALO SVEVO represents one of the most remarkable cases on record of a writer who, after being ignored for years, was "discovered" by other writers and handed over to a sensation-loving public. It is rare that an artist attains international fame and remains unknown in his native town; in two years more was written about Svevo than he had ever written himself, but even after this belated recognition his works found few readers. A young American tells of his arrival in Italy shortly after Svevo's death in a motor accident in September, 1928. Convinced by what he had read in French periodicals that Svevo was the greatest Italian novelist since Manzoni, he sought his books. No bookseller had them, and finally he had to order them from the publisher. Up to the time of Svevo's death, moreover, his name had appeared in only one of the many histories of contemporary literature—and that one happened to be by a Frenchman.

In fact, Italy's reluctance to accept Svevo immediately may be explained in part at least by a natural unwillingness to have Paris dictate her literary fashions. The Italian is always chauvinistic at best, and especially under the fascist régime one may expect the public to take its time in forgetting that Svevo's fame began on the yonder side of the Alps. But now Italo Svevo has been properly re-naturalized. Federico Sternberg's two hundred-page book on his work has appeared and complete numbers of all the important magazines have been given over to doing him honor. The publisher Morreale has undertaken to reissue his complete works, and one even finds the Italians taking pride in the English, French, Spanish, German, Hungarian, and Polish translations, which are fast appearing. Finally the literary historians have introduced him into their latest editions, attempting to classify him in one of the post-naturalistic "schools".

It was neither a Frenchman nor a critic, however, who first recognized Svevo's genius; it was James Joyce, who has to his credit another, almost equally valuable discovery, that of Edouard Dujardin and *Les lauriers sont coupés*. When Svevo's first novel, *Una Vita*, appeared in 1893, it was mildly acclaimed by the critics, among whom was Domenico Oliva; but in 1898 *Senilità* received not a word of praise or censure. Svevo abandoned writing and became a successful manufacturer in his native city of Trieste, where in the years immediately preceding the War he took English lessons under James Joyce. Joyce became enthusiastic about his work, encouraging him to continue writing; in Paris later he gave Svevo's two novels to those excellent critics and extraordinary impresarios of foreign culture, Valery Larbaud and Benjamin Crémieux. In 1914 the Austrian government took over Svevo's factory as a munitions plant and, finding himself with four years of enforced leisure, he began *La Coscienza di Zeno*, his most am-

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bitious work, which he published at his own expense in 1923. It too went unnoticed in Italy until Larbaud and Crémieux "launched" Svevo in *Le Navire d'Argent*, early in 1926. In less than a year *Zeno* came out in a French translation by Paul Michel. Meanwhile several Italian critics were already aware of Svevo's importance; Eugenio Montale had written two studies of his work before his reputation had been established in Paris.

In no time, Svevo was almost crushed under the superlatives and flattering comparisons which rained down upon him. His name was linked with those of Joyce, Marcel Proust, Verga, Balzac and Flaubert. At sixty-five he was acclaimed a leader of the young writers of Italy. He was invited to Paris and presented into the various *chapelles littéraires*; people went out of their way to visit him in Trieste. He must have felt rather like Mario Samigli, the hero of *The Hoax* (*Una burla riuscita*), the first time someone came to his door and asked to see Italo Svevo the novelist instead of Ettore Schmitz the manufacturer (for he had taken a pseudonym before publishing his first work). Like Marcel Proust he lived to enjoy the beginning of his glory and died at just the right moment to insure its permanence; unfortunately, however, he was not given time to finish *Il Vecchione*.

So much, once and for all, for the "strange case" of Italo Svevo: the story of his sudden appearance on the literary horizon and the importance he immediately assumed doubtless makes good advertising matter; it does not, however, make a substitute for criticism. Indeed it has frequently led critics so far astray that they have forgotten to say anything about his work. Svevo must be judged on his three novels, two of which have already appeared in English. His short stories, with the exception of *La Novella del buon Vecchio e della bella Fanciulla*, which has the proportions of a novel, can be overlooked for the moment; it was a great mistake to first present him in English with *The Hoax* (published here by Harcourt, Brace), certainly his least attractive work. Svevo, like Proust, must be approched with patience and good will, for he at first seems difficult and only a large dose can give the full measure of his power and charm.

One can easily recognize the qualities which attracted the attention of Joyce and Larbaud to these novels; for they are qualities which are shared by their own work: the acceptance of the whole domain of the real, the slightest details of daily life and the wildest aspirations of his protagonists; the lack of any arbitrary simplification; the continual self-questioning in which his characters indulge while never ceasing to act and to bask sensually in the life which surrounds them. And Crémieux, as a historian of contemporary Italian literature, could not fail to recognize here the first and only novels of psychological analysis that modern Italy had produced. Years before Joyce and Larbaud had begun to write, Svevo most successfully used the "interior monologue" or stream-of-consciousness method of recording and giving life to his characters' thoughts and sensations. It is this fact more than any other, as in the case of Dujardin, which explains his lack of popularity in the nineties and his sudden recognition in the twenties, when that method became popular. In any country or any language, Italo Svevo would have been a precursor, a man who lived before his time; in Italy where, Pirandello and Borgese notwithstanding, the novel which emphasizes interior or "psychological" action has not even yet been naturalized, he appears as a greater phenomenon than he would have been in France, for instance (where he would have joined the tradition of Constant, Stendhal, and Flaubert).

But despite this disconcerting twentieth-century quality in Svevo, he has not lost all contact with the classic models of the last century. The classic French models, that is: for those three great forces which alternately shaped and stifled the Italian novel during

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the past fifty years, Manzoni, Verga and d'Annunzio, exerted no influence whatsoever upon him. Certainly he was familiar with Balzac, Stendhal, and Flaubert; Silvio Benco asserts of the young Svevo: "Zola was his god, the *Roman expérimental* his credo". It is true that he owes something to Zola and the naturalists, but fortunately he outgrew that influence very early. In fact the best conception of Svevo's debt to—or rather his points of resemblance with—naturalism can be formed from a study of Paul Bourget's remarks on the art of the Goncourt brothers (in *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*): "Représenter des mœurs, c'est peindre des personnages de facultés moyennes. . . . Mais comment rendre perceptible la formation des habitudes, qui, de nature, est presque imperceptible? Justement au moyen d'une minutieuse peinture d'états successifs. . . . Ils se trouvaient, de par leur souci d'historiens des mœurs, condammés à peindre des personnages qui subissent la vie sans la dominer, c'est-à-dire des créatures d'une volonté médiocre . . . et presque toute leur œuvre, est une longue étude des maladies de la personnalité". This page, dated ten years earlier than *Una Vita*, might very well stand as a statement of Svevo's principles.

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of these novels is the type of hero that Svevo created in them: a sort of middle-class Triestine Charlie Chaplin, as one writer has described him, who continually exhausts his extraordinary ingenuity in conquering absurdly small obstacles, and with a pathetic obstinacy fails in everything he undertakes. Charlie Chaplin or Don Quixote in modern dress, the fact remains that Svevo has definitely given life to his complex character and presented him in a very tragic and very real light. The Svevian protagonist springs from a fundamental realization of the disequilibrium between the direction given to his own life by the individual and the course which life then pursues, sublimely ignorant of his well-made plans. And in his confused suffering he never quite wakes up to his error. Eager and intelligent, he fails through his own awkward timidity; he stands forever agape at the facility with which others realize their desires. Alfonso in *Una Vita*, while out sailing with Macario, marvels at the vast wings and small bodies of the gulls, and Macario reflects on the smallness of the brain. "'But what has the brain to do with catching fish? He who lacks the necessary wings when he is born will never grow them later. He who doesn't instinctively know how to swoop down on his prey at the precise moment will never learn; and in vain he will study how the others do it, but will never be able to imitate them.' . . . 'And have I wings?' asked Alfonso, beginning to smile. . . . 'Yes, for the flights of your imagination!' answered Macario." Alfonso Nitti, Emilio Brentani, and Zeno Cosini form one type-protagonist who, because he exemplifies for the first time in concrete form a whole class of humanity, is as worthy as Proust's Baron de Charlus of entering the group of the immortal "characters" of fiction.

One might well amuse oneself by contrasting Zeno Cosini with Julien Sorel: on the one hand the man who knows what he wants and invariably gets it; on the other the eternally misplaced one whose ambition is frustrated by his inability to adapt himself. Stendhal glorifies the energetic will, whereas Svevo deliberately chooses persons almost devoid of will. Psychologically they are at opposite poles, but Svevo's exaggeration, if it is exaggeration, approaches nearer to reality. The difference is not unlike that between Corneille and Racine, Horace and Phèdre.

Whether or not, to return to Bourget's page on the brothers Goncourt, Italo Svevo chose such submissive creatures in order to devote himself to a prolonged study of the abnormal personality, the result is the same. As a matter of fact, it is much more likely that his choice was dictated by his own nature and that there is much of Ettore

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Schmitz in his three heroes. The notable difference in the ages of those heroes may be of some significance, since the age, in each case, corresponds to that of the novelist at the time of writing. Yet he never loses his altogether objective viewpoint; "*guardare e analizzare*"—observation and analysis was his rule, and as with all novelists of introspection it was inevitable that some of his experiments should have been originally performed on his own person.

In *Una Vita* Svevo has already chosen his setting in the *bourgeoisie* of Trieste and drawn the first sketch of his typical hero. At the age of twenty, Alfonso Nitti, poor in money and experience, but full of a romantic enthusiasm for life, leaves his little town to settle in the city as a clerk in the bank of Maller and Company. From the first he appears, and to the end he remains, a *déraciné*, dazed in the attempt to make his desires conform to the life he sees about him. Introduced into his employer's house, he makes love to and eventually seduces Annetta, the banker's daughter. Thus far Alfonso's career almost parallels that of Julien Sorel in *Le Rouge et le noir*; but having achieved this success, which one might think would satisfy his desires and realize all his ambitions with a rich marriage, he withdraws through pure inertia. He allows to slip from his hands the opportunity he had longed for merely because he is incapable of a decision. Sent away from the city while Annetta gains her father's consent, he returns from his mother's death-bed to find Annetta engaged to her cousin Macario and himself relegated to an inferior position in the bank. The moment his weakness betrays him, Life turns about and deals him a series of blows. Too late, he recognizes his loss, makes an appointment with Annetta in an attempt to win her back, and just avoids a duel with her brother. The only outlet for his despair is suicide. Crémieux has very justly pointed out that *Una Vita*, whose very title suggests rather the later French naturalists, is perhaps the only novel in Italian which at all resembles Flaubert: the interior tragedy of this little bank employee fed on dreams of love and glory, approaches the theme of *L'Éducation sentimentale* and *Madame Bovary*.

Senilità (to be published here in the autumn by Knopf), which followed six years after *Una Vita*, is, despite the majority of critics in favor of *Zeno*, undoubtedly his best work, for it is at once more carefully composed, and more universal in its theme than the *Coscienza di Zeno*. Emilio Brentani, an ordinary clerk like Alfonso, is another *raté*, disillusioned in his youthful aspirations and unable to adapt himself to the prosaic life that has been given him. Through indifference, he has forsaken his literary ambitions while still weakly longing for "what might have been"; and at thirty-five, full of the bitterness of unsatisfied desires and without ever having really lived, he has reached a premature old age (hence the somewhat unfortunate title of the novel). His desolate life, spent entirely in the company of his spinster sister Amalia, thwarted and withered like himself, and the lady-killing sculptor Balli, whose jovial acceptance of mediocrity contrasts sharply with Emilio's pathological reaction against fate, is suddenly transformed by the presence of Angiolina Zarri. Trying to forget his self-consciousness, Emilio flatters himself that he can throw himself into an affair with the little slut like a man of the world; but no sooner has he crudely declared and satisfied his wants than his imagination, aroused by her ingenuous manner and refusing to recognize the bestiality of their relation, attempts to etherealize her and to create a sentimental bond of love between them. Tormented by jealousy, he is ironically forced to share her with the urbane Balli. The tragedy reaches its climax when his sister in delirium reveals her love for Balli and the fact that she has had recourse to drugs to lighten her despair. Conscious that he has corrupted Amalia's soul, he sees

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her die just as he had resolved to give up his love and devote himself to her alone. And after this staggering shock, the life of Emilio and Balli resumes its monotonous course. "Years later he would lose himself in wonder over that period of his life, the most important, the most dazzling. He lived upon it like an old man on the memories of his youth. In his mind full of literary allusions, Angiolina underwent a strange metamorphosis: she preserved her beauty unchanged, but at the same time annexed all the qualities of Amalia who died a second time in her. . . . She came to represent his every noble thought and beautiful observation during that period of his life." Thus Emilio's creative imagination, which had tormented him throughout his life, finally consoles him with this pitiful symbol.

The beauty of this remarkable novel lies in its compactness, its density. Beginning, as he always does, *in medias res*, Svevo gives us a strikingly real portrait of life as he has seen it—or perhaps lived it. In creating his four major characters, he has plumbed the depths of their personality without limiting himself to the zone of the conscious.

In the twenty-five years which separate *Senilità* from *La Coscienza di Zeno*, Italo Svevo's pessimism has learned to clothe itself in humor, to give itself a calmer exterior, though in reality it has deepened to the point where it no longer even attempts a revolt. The tragedy of the aged Zeno Cosini is the same as that of Alfonso Nitti and Emilio Brentani—with this great difference, however: that it does not even partially take place in the world of physical reality. It is altogether staged *within* Zeno; on the exterior, his life does not seem so difficult as that of his predecessors, but his torment is far deeper and more subtle than theirs. Life continually smiles upon him, though through no fault or merit of his. Outwardly he is successful in everything, and he alone knows that his every move and every thought has marked another failure. Like a child, he reaches out for some forbidden object and finds in his hand a different and, to him, useless object. Even when his most ardent desires are leading him toward a catastrophe, life steps in to provide a happy conclusion for his actions. The story of Zeno is even more difficult to outline than that of the other novels; fortunately, however, we can already read this one in English. In an attempt to ridicule some of the theories of psycho-analysis, Svevo presents these thickly-printed five hundred pages as Zeno's memoirs, the writing of which was imposed upon him by a psycho-analyst as part of his "cure". These confessions, then, bare the character of Zeno, another maladjusted, curiously distorted individual, completely devoid of will-power, whose mania for analyzing each thought and gesture that comes to his notice presents a bitter caricature of our modern madness. Too weak to cure himself of the habit of smoking, he has himself locked up in a sanatorium and then exerts all his ingenuity in schemes for corrupting his nurse and escaping by night, and in suspicions of his wife's fidelity while he is away from home. Instead of marrying the girl he loves, he accepts her refusal and that of her sister only to marry the third sister whom he does not love; and eventually he finds in her the ideal wife. He succeeds in deceiving her without arousing the slightest suspicion, while his brother-in-law in the same situation gets into endless trouble. Despite his wild schemes and misplaced activity, he is a great success in business and even manages to save the fortune of Guido, his brilliant brother-in-law. He is the chronic imaginary invalid who has only to hear a description of a malady in order to feel its symptoms; and yet he lives to bury his healthier friends.

Although Zeno may appear to us, and may even recognize himself, as a comedy character, we must be careful not to treat him too lightly. He is the natural outgrowth of Svevo's other protagonists plus twenty-five years of mature reflection. It seems as if

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Svevo had deliberately tried to attain popularity by masking his tragedy behind a sly smile. For under his ridiculous exterior Zeno suffers profoundly in his dangerously overpowerful imagination, his exaggerated tendency to self-analysis, and his vicious attempts at self-justification. His will-less efforts to combat his weaknesses and adjust himself to the world set him at odds with the same problems which confronted Alfonso and Emilio.

One cannot but notice, by comparison with the other novels, a certain unaccustomed diffuseness in this later work. Nor is *The Confessions of Zeno* (Knopf), constructed with such economy of detail and interrelation of incidents as one finds in *Senilità*. Zeno's efforts to cease smoking, the death of his father, his marriage and his financial career stand out as individually flawless elements insufficiently knit together. We get Zeno portrayed from every angle until, without any effort on our part, his character emerges in one piece, whereas the novel (but perhaps this is justified by the form in which it is written) remains episodic. Italo Svevo's peculiar ironic humor, which colors all of his work, resists description or analysis; in fact it often almost resists translation. The least one can say of it is that it in no way resembles the humor of Panzini or Pirandello.

Outside of these three novels Italo Svevo left nothing but a handful of short stories published in various magazines during the last three years and gathered into a volume in 1929, together with the first pages of his unfinished fourth novel. Among his *inédits*, there is a comedy that was produced in 1927 at Bragaglia's *Teatro degli Indipendenti* at Rome, and a lecture on James Joyce, delivered in Milan the same year. When considered quantitatively, this appears a meagre output for a man who began writing at thirty and lived to be sixty-seven. Still, other reputations greater than his have been founded on no more. And without hesitation we can place him not only above all his contemporaries in Italy, but in the first rank among modern European novelists.

Although Svevo's style has been much discussed by his compatriots, it will probably not seem remarkable in English, for we are more accustomed to the qualities it manifests. At first it strikes one as almost shockingly bare; later one recognizes that it is incredibly, refreshingly devoid of that rhetoric or false eloquence which Italians almost never escape. Since he was born in what was then an Austrian city and educated largely in Germany, it is not strange that his language should contain many barbarisms. The words are Italian, but they are not always used in an Italian manner. But ugly as it may be, Svevo uses his language as a forceful tool which always achieves the end for which it was created. He writes badly as Dreiser does, or as Henry James did.

Almost more important as a unifying factor in this work than his original manner of evoking life by simple narration and profound analysis or his very real creation of a complex type of hero hitherto unknown to literature, we find another, and rather intangible, element: the climate of his novels. His characters all live and act against the background of Trieste with its great mercantile port and modern industrial life. This city—the only one which appears in his work—gradually assumes a definite personality, until it becomes one of the actors in the drama. It is not necessary to know Trieste to appreciate Svevo; he creates the city for us until we feel, on the contrary, that it would be necessary to know Svevo to appreciate Trieste. There is indeed a Trieste of Svevo just as there is a Dublin of James Joyce and a Paris of Balzac. And in the harmonious combination of these various elements which constitutes the work of Italo Svevo, we must go a step further and admit that there exists a Svevian world, for every great artist possesses a world of his own which he alone can open to us.

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PRELUDE

by Conrad Aiken

I

All this is nothing: all that we said is nothing:
Your eyes, your hair, are nothing, your grief, your tears,—
Your laughter too, that filled the room with laughter,
And your quick step, as quickly gone as come;
Nothing, nothing, as goldenrod is nothing,
Withered in season, and from it gone the web,
And the poor spider gone, and all his flies.
What's goldenrod to Deneb, that bright star?
What means the spider to the moon? what means
This lecherous human, with his loves and griefs,
To such rank vegetation as Venus knows,
Or the cold chasms of snow that mantle Mars?
Nothing: they do not know us. We dispense
With all authority; and what we are,
Or what we have, are what we have and are
In our own godhead, and in that alone.

II

And all is meaningless? . . . Or all means nothing?
Your hand is but a claw for clutching food,
Food for the heart or belly? . . . Your two eyes
But sharpened senses for the just perception

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Of this? . . . So come we to our mother chaos.
But there is,—so you tell me,—music, too:
Music and beauty, and the love of love,
Music and love and beauty, and all that.
There is this moment, this unsubstantial moment,
Which has a substance deep as God is deep:
Deeper, in fact, than thought of God can be.
You there, I here,—the rug of wool between us,
Four pictures on the wall, a room, a house,
Water in pipes, brought from the hills for us,
An ash-tray, and a table, and three chairs:
All this devised for man by man; all this,
And our communion through them, and our speech.
You there, I here, who half-perceive each other. . . .

III

Woman, the thing is madness, we are mad.
You are not Helen, nor I Solomon.
Bathsheba you are not, nor am I Troy.

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THE FACSIMILE TEXT SOCIETY

by Robert Shafer

THE organization of a society "for the reproduction of rare printed texts and manuscripts" was announced at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association of America in December, 1929. Later a prospectus (now in its second edition) was issued, which explains fully the organization and program of the Society. Its tutelar genius is Professor Frank A. Patterson of Columbia University, who has an executive committee to assist him in carrying on the proposed work, and also a council, to whose members "the executive committee may appeal for general advice and assistance". There are in addition, at present, thirteen program committees, engaged presumably in selecting texts for reproduction. The mechanical work has been entrusted to the National Process Company of New York. The Society engages to produce accurate facsimiles from rotographs—*i.e.,* photographic copies—by the offset process, which is said to be as faithful to the original pages as collotype—at least for the purpose of "securing typographical details". The whole field of works useful to scholars, "without limitation as to the period or language of the original text", has been pre-empted, with the single exception of Elizabethan drama. This exception was made at the request of the Malone Society, which for nearly twenty-five years has been engaged in reproducing Elizabethan dramatic texts. "When one considers", the author of the prospectus says, "the large number of important texts that are unique or exist in very few copies and remembers also that many of the essential modern tools of scholarship are practically unprocurable, the work of the Society appears almost limitless." For the present, this work will be confined to five series, whose titles, however, are comprehensive: Literature and Language; History; Philosophy; History of Science; and Economics, Political and Social Science. The only qualification for membership in the Society is ability to pay the dues ($5.00 the year), and anyone, whether a member or not, may purchase its publications. The chief advantage afforded by membership is the privilege of securing publications at a substantial discount whenever one's purchases amount to more than $5.00 in any single year —purchases up to this amount being debited against the dues.

By the end of 1930, the Society had obtained 563 members—a surprisingly large number—and had published eight volumes. It is felt that readers of THE BOOKMAN should know of its existence and work, and that many of them will give it a hearty welcome and active support. It deserves both, because its potential importance is great, though its continuance and success depend entirely upon its becoming known promptly to the right persons, and upon their giving it something more substantial than their passive approval. And though, as is indicated above, the advantage of membership is likely

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at present, in most cases, to be inappreciable to the individual, it should be realized that an increasing membership is a very real and great advantage to the Society, because of the steady, dependable income it assures. This is, in fact, an essential condition of the organization's success.

The Society's success, however, will depend not alone on its income, but equally on its management; and those who are interested in its work, in proportion as their interest is real, will gravely compromise its future if they weakly close their eyes to the fact that mistakes have been made, and are being made—mistakes of the most damaging kind. Such mistakes may be natural—they may even be inevitable—in a new undertaking; but that, surely, is no reason for persisting in them stubbornly. And though it is unfortunate enough, in all conscience, that it must be said, it is not a kindness to the Society to conceal the fact that its present management, while leaving nothing to be desired on the score of enthusiasm, ambition, and confidence, seems to be ill-qualified for other than "promotional" activities. This, at any rate, is the inference unescapably suggested by the first year's work of the Society, for the following reasons:

The books thus far published are not only cheap looking, but ugly. The prospectus states that they are printed on "a good rag paper", and bound in a "cover somewhat resembling the publications of the Malone Society". The paper, to be sure, is actually watermarked "100% RAG"; but, nevertheless, it is bad paper—disagreeable to the eye and to the hand, unpleasant in tone, and apparently unfriendly to ink, with its self-laudatory watermark standing as an additional minor count against it. It suggests that the person responsible for its choice is either quite inexperienced or quite lacking in taste. Furthermore, the offset process of printing, though it may be a necessary evil because of its cheapness, is a poor makeshift when compared with collotype, and there is no use in pretending that the results now attainable with it are entirely satisfactory—though it is likely enough that the results would be far better with a suitable paper. The inner defects of these books, however, though grave, are eclipsed by the outer. One is tempted to assert that nothing could be worse than the casing "somewhat resembling the publications of the Malone Society". "Somewhat"—! —well, the author of the prospectus has at least packed a world of meaning into that word, and probably has established a record. It is a pity this notice cannot be accompanied by an exhibit; for only so could the difference bridged by "somewhat" be made clear. As it is, it must suffice to say that there could scarcely be an uglier blue than that on the sides of these volumes, and that the backs in texture, color, and lettering are little better. The Malone Society's volumes, which these "somewhat" resemble, are finely printed by the Oxford Press on paper which—whether "100% RAG" or not—is perfectly suited to its purpose; and are beautifully cased in unbleached canvas backs and paper boards of a soft grayish blue. As far as appearance goes, between the publications of the two societies there is all the difference lying between perfect taste and complete tastelessness.

Another difference exists, moreover, between the publications of the two societies, which raises an important question. The Malone Society's reproductions of Elizabethan plays are type-facsimiles. It is well known that different copies of the same edition of books printed before the advent of plates frequently vary from each other in more or less important details, both because of the shifting of movable types and because of corrections made, whenever discovered, while the sheets were printing. Furthermore, "letters or points that are smudged, broken, faint, or otherwise doubtful in one copy" are generally "clear in another". Hence type-facsimiles, which can be based on a careful collation of several copies, are not only far easier to read, but are almost certain to be

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more useful to students, because more faithful to the original, than facsimiles produced from rotographs, such as those of the Facsimile Text Society. Against this, the only thing said by the speaker for the latter Society is that, "One of the greatest advantages of reproducing [by the offset process] is the rapidity with which volumes may be furnished. This rapidity is gained largely through dispensing with proof-reading and by the omission of critical introductions and notes". The Malone Society, however, prints only textual introductions and notes. Its aim, within its important field, is identical with that of the Facsimile Text Society, though its procedure is very different. And the difference lies in the fact that its method of reproduction requires scrupulously thorough and competent editing.

There is, unquestionably, a place for each kind of facsimile, depending upon circumstances. But, no less unquestionably, it is a mistake to embark, as the Facsimile Text Society has embarked, upon the exclusive and indiscriminate production of offset-process facsimiles—with, apparently, no object save the infinite and instant multiplication of cheap, unattractive copies of old books. One of the uses of intelligent and competent scholarship, it might be thought, would be to save us from just such an inundation as the Facsimile Text Society promises. What purpose, indeed, do the officers of the Society think they can serve? From their published statements one can only infer that they do not clearly know. In a "somewhat" frantic and undignified promotional appeal recently issued, it is said: "Libraries, large and small, are beginning to see that the work of the Society offers to them a long-awaited opportunity to secure source material with which their [whose?] advanced classes can work to great advantage". But the Society's prospectus everywhere implies that the organization aims solely to furnish scholars with important texts and "essential modern tools" for the accelerated prosecution of research. Yet surely these two purposes are very different, and cannot be accomplished by a single program not well calculated for either.

That the present program is not well calculated for any purpose yet thought of by the enterprising management of the Society is sufficiently shown by the two publications which serve as the occasion for this notice.* Donne's *Biathanatos*—a casuistical treatise in justification of suicide—is a rare book, but a scholarly account of it, entirely adequate for any "advanced class", is given in Mrs. Simpson's *Study of the Prose Works of Donne;* and she agrees with Dr. Jessopp that it is merely "a literary curiosity", and adds on her own account that it is one of the two "dullest of Donne's works". If, for the purposes of "advanced classes", any pieces by Donne now need to be issued in facsimile, they are some of his sermons. But if, on the other hand, it is thought that, because of recent estimates of Donne's importance in seventeenth-century literature, all of his work should be made accessible to scholars and mature students, what was evidently needed was an edition—probably only a text-edition—but, still, an edition, not an offset-process facsimile. This is made evident by the admirable bibliographical note prefixed to the Society's reprint by Professor J. William Hebel, from which it appears that only an edition with full textual apparatus could reproduce *Biathanatos* in a form fully useful to scholars.

The Society's management, to be sure, takes the position that the beneficent scattering of facsimiles over the land will in no way act as a bar to the production of accurate editions when they are wanted—though if a *book* is wanted, in any form, it might be supposed that it is already wanted in the best

* John Donne: *Biathanatos*. Reproduced from the First Edition with a Bibliographical Note by J. William Hebel. The Facsimile Text Society, New York. $2.50.

Henry More: *Enchiridion Ethicum*. The English Translation of 1690, Reproduced from the First Edition [with a Bibliographical Note by Sterling P. Lamprecht]. The Facsimile Text Society, New York. $2.50.

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form attainable. But it seems really to be fancied that these facsimiles will promote editorial activity—though, at the same time, so little agreement with this fancy is anticipated that the author of the prospectus is careful to state: "Whenever the Society learns that any of its contemplated reproductions is about to be edited or reprinted independently, it will gladly reconsider its plans". And, as a matter of fact, no publisher is likely to undertake an edition of *Biathanatos,* nor any editor, so long as hundreds of copies of this cheap facsimile remain on the open market. And the same situation will result, of course, in the case of each of the Society's other publications. There are, indeed, only two ways of adequately encountering this serious responsibility. The Society should be a society in reality as well as in name, with a limited membership, printing its publications solely for members, and guarding them carefully from sale to the public, as do the Grolier Society and other similar organizations. Or, otherwise, confessing itself to be a scholarly publishing enterprise, the Society should, in consultation with its members, undertake editions or type-facsimiles with full textual apparatus when they are needed; and should, above all, avoid multiplying reproductions which are chiefly prejudicial to sound scholarship.

That this at present is a very real danger can be seen not only from the case of *Biathanatos,* but also from that of Henry More's *Enchiridion Ethicum,* and—as will presently be shown—from the Society's list of "Texts Being Considered for Reproduction". As has already been explained, the object of the Society, as stated in its prospectus, is to produce the greatest possible number of facsimiles as hastily as it can be done, with the minimum of editorial care. The ideal is purely quantitative, and is calculated to encourage cheap scholarship aiding in the production of cheap books. This, as we are daily told by some wiseacre or another, is the era of mass-production, and the Society is apparently engaged in demonstrating its perfect "adjustment" to the dominant methods and ideals of the moment. As witness the *Enchiridion Ethicum*: the book was written in Latin, and was never translated by its author. But for the purposes of modern scholarship the Society is content to reproduce an English translation which appeared in 1690. Professor Lamprecht in his prefatory note states that this translation was again published in 1701, but he fails to add that the later volume bore on its title page the words: "The Second Edition, corrected". The claim thus made certainly deserved examination, before the Society determined which edition to reproduce, and purchasers of the volume certainly deserved to know the full results of such an examination. As a matter of fact, the publisher's claim was justified; certain not unimportant mistakes in the first edition are corrected in the second, though, at the same time, a perhaps equal number of new mistakes are made—so that this is another case in which only an edition with textual apparatus, not a facsimile of either original, could have proved satisfactory. But there is no indication that Professor Lamprecht took the trouble to learn even this much about the book, or that the officers of the Society desired him to do so. Furthermore, since the book is a translation, whose chief value lies not in its independent merits but in the fact that it is a translation, purchasers of the volume should certainly have been told something, at least, concerning its relation to the original; but on this subject Professor Lamprecht is also silent. He devotes more than half of his Bibliographical Note to certain statements concerning Edward Southwell, the translator, and perhaps the seriousness with which he took his task, and the extent of his acquaintance with the book he consented to sponsor, may be gauged from one of these statements. Professor Lamprecht learned from the *Dictionary of National Biography* that Southwell was born in September, 1671.

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Hence, he says, "he must have completed the translation of Henry More's *Enchiridion Ethicum* before the end of his nineteenth year"—since it was published in the autumn of 1690. Evidently, however, Professor Lamprecht failed to see an "Advertisement", following the "Extract of Dr. More's Epistle to his Reader", in which Southwell explains his principles of translation. Obviously the work had been done when this "Advertisement" was written, and it is dated, "K. W. Septemb. 1688".

There you are. The best one can say is that More's ethical treatise has now been dealt with in a manner "somewhat" resembling the methods of scholarship. And as one looks to the future what can one say? In its prospectus the Society lists one hundred and five works which "are being considered tentatively for early publication, many during 1930". This list is extraordinary, and no brief general description can do it justice. It is a first glance, it must be remembered, into the "almost limitless" field which the Society seeks to preëmpt. What does it reveal? It shows, most strikingly, that the author of the prospectus, after exclaiming over the "large number of important texts that are unique or exist in very few copies", had great difficulty in discovering any. Of his one hundred and five titles, practically one half are drawn from the field of early American literature and history—while the other half are distributed (very unevenly) over the whole field of the remaining literatures and history of the world, and over philosophy, the history of science, economics, and political and social science. Early American literature and history have their importance, of course, which no one would think of denying; but it is equally incontestable that this is a minute territory in comparison with that to which the Society has laid claim. And it is likewise incontestable that American history, early and late, is one of the most thoroughly explored and re-explored subjects known to man. Doubtless endless further work remains to be done—and always will remain—because the enthusiasm of the antiquary knows no limits, and because re-interpretation is always an entertaining possibility and is often a desirable and enlightening occupation. Nevertheless, nobody will rise to say, with the slightest plausibility, that there is at this moment a burning need for the greater number of these proposed facsimiles of early American travel books and the like. And it is perfectly obvious that when, out of a group of twenty-five proposed facsimiles in the field of history, twenty fall within early American history, the man who composed the list was in only one situation—up a tree. And there he stuck, again, when he had to fill out the series entitled "Literature and Language". How many would ever have imagined, one asks oneself, when told of "the large number of important texts that are unique or exist in very few copies", of which the world of scholarship stands in urgent need—how many would ever have imagined that out of fifty-four titles in this vast field thirty-three would fall in the tiny garden-plot of early American literature? How many would ever have expected to see, amongst the very first to be reproduced in the great roll of important literary texts, books by Anne Bradstreet, Mather Byles, Robert Calef, John Cotton, Peter Folger, Philip Freneau, Thomas Godfrey, John Josselyn, John Lawson, William Livingston, William Morrell, Richard Rich, Mary Rowlandson, Phillis Wheatley, Roger Wolcott, and Michael Wigglesworth?

There is only one answer to this question—an answer which every reader will be able to give without hesitation. And the plain fact is that when the author of the prospectus came to exhibit the riches he had promised, he found the cupboard bare. He evidently then appealed to a very learned man, Professor Ralph L. Rusk, a member of the Society's executive committee, who took this opportunity seriously, and did what was possible to stuff out the list with texts chosen from his own field of study.

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A couple of examples will sufficiently show how the remainder of this precious list was put together. In the first edition of the prospectus, under History, was entered the volume of Sir Thomas More's *English Works* published in 1557. And the Society's spokesman said: "An indication of the widespread interest in many of the titles given below is the fact that scholars interested in literature, history, economics, and philosophy independently suggested" that the Society should reprint this volume. One cannot help wanting to know something about these scholars; for as long ago as 1927 Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode published the first volume of an elaborate and admirable edition of Sir Thomas More's *English Works,* which deserves every encouragement from interested scholars. Yet none of the Facsimile Text Society's officers or advisers had heard of this important undertaking until the circulation of their prospectus caused Professor A. W. Reed to inform them of it and to request their abandonment of their projected reproduction of the 1557 volume.

It must have been a disappointment; for this was, in fact, almost the only volume in the Society's list which convincingly illustrated the contention—whose truth no one would be likely to dispute—that there are a "large number of important texts that are unique or exist in very few copies". John Soowthern's *Pandora* (1584)—another title on the list—is a volume of which only one copy is known, and it has never been reprinted. But, alas, it is not important. Its historical interest is slight, and the poetical paraphrases it contains are certainly amongst the most worthless pieces ever penned by mortal hand. It is difficult to believe that more than half a dozen scholars, at the most, can have the slightest reason to want this volume; and that a rotograph of it deposited in the Modern Language Association's collection would not amply justify any need for it that now exists or ever will exist.

Other titles in the list are important, but not rare. The second edition (1673) of John Hales's *Golden Remains* is an example. The present writer purchased a good copy of this, in a contemporary binding still in a fair state of preservation, only a couple of years ago—and paid fifteen shillings for it.* He has since seen other copies offered for sale at approximately the same price. This is, moreover, a large book, which judging by the prices of its already published volumes, the Society could scarcely reproduce for less than $7.50—or twice as much as the present value of the original. In addition, the proposal to reproduce this volume again raises the question—as do others on the list—as to what purpose is to be served. The second edition of the *Golden Remains* is textually of no importance save for a small portion of its contents. It does not, besides, contain Hales's most famous piece, "A Tract concerning Schism and Schismaticks", which, though printed (probably surreptitiously) from an imperfect manuscript in 1642, and later reprinted from this imperfect copy in a quarto pamphlet sometimes found bound up with the 1673 *Golden Remains,* was not correctly printed until 1677. It also does not contain other important pieces by Hales, such as his "Letter to Archbishop Laud", his "Tract concerning the Sin against the Holy Ghost", his "Tract concerning the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper", his "Paraphrase on S. Matthew's Gospel", and his "Tract concerning the Power of the Keys and Auricular Confession". These tracts are more useful to the student than the majority of Hales's sermons. Hence it is difficult to imagine any good reason for this proposed facsimile.†

* Ralph Cudworth's *Sermon Preached before the House of Commons* has been reproduced by the Society, at the price of $1.50. This was reprinted in 1852, and the present writer's copy of the reprint cost him two shillings and six pence.

† The writer is anxious only to present the facts fairly, and so should add that he has for some time been gathering materials for a contemplated edition of Hales's works, which, he conceives, is what is needed. There has been only one collected edition, edited by Lord Hailes and published in Glasgow in 1765. This,

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One more example of the judgment exercised by the officers of the Society in making their list of works to be reproduced must be given. The Society has now in preparation a facsimile of Joseph Glanvill's *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), and proposes soon to reprint the same author's *Scepsis Scientifica* (1665), which is wrongly dated 1663 in both editions of the Society's prospectus. Both books are rare—the second rarer than the first, because many copies of it were destroyed in the Great Fire. The second was, however, reprinted in 1885, and copies of this reprint can usually be found with little trouble, and do not command a high price. Moreover, the *Scepsis Scientifica* is merely a revised and improved version of *The Vanity of Dogmatizing,* with certain additions. The differences between the two, so far as content is concerned, are negligible, except for the additions just mentioned.* What, therefore, can be the justification for the Society's reproducing both versions of this book? And, if the reprint of 1885 is so unreliable as to make another reprint desirable—as to this the present writer does not know—what can be the reason for reproducing first Glanvill's earlier, less satisfactory draft of his book? And why, if either version of this youthful work of Glanvill's should be reproduced, should not the Society contemplate (as it does not) the reproduction of the book in which he gave the argument of *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* its final form, his *Essays on several Important Subjects in Philosophy and Religion* (1676)?

One could go on, but there is no need. The Society's list of contemplated reprints is, to speak plainly, a disgraceful hotchpotch, hastily, uncritically, ignorantly slapped together,* with the confident expectation, apparently, that anything can be "put over" in America. Merely as a piece of "promotion" it could hardly be better calculated to defeat itself. Yet, while it deserves severe condemnation, the Society, on the other hand, deserves a better fate. Clearly, its present management is a misfortune; that management has done what it could to launch the Society in the wrong way, with the utmost pretentiousness and with the utmost embarrassment to its future. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that the Society will survive and prosper. The work it has undertaken, properly planned and properly carried out, is of essential importance to the cause of scholarship in America, and deserves the support of all who are interested in that cause. It would undoubtedly have been better, at least in the beginning, had the Society confined its efforts to a small and well-defined field—as does the Malone Society in England, under the direction of Dr. W. W. Greg—and had it been so fortunate as to grow naturally, like the Malone Society, out of the deep and serious interest of a great scholar, or, otherwise, of a small group willing to work slowly and carefully and to make sacrifices for the right kind of success. However, things must be taken as they come, and made the best of. And it is because of this writer's active interest in the plans of the Society, and conviction of its great potential importance, that he has been compelled to speak out frankly, before it should be too late.

unlike the 1673 *Golden Remains,* is a genuinely scarce work. The writer has also had the intention of reprinting the works of Robert Greville (the second Lord Brooke), one of whose pieces appears in the Society's list of projected reproductions. In neither case, however, can he very well bring his claims, such as they may be, to the attention of the Society, because, other tasks standing in the way, he cannot hope to complete either edition promptly. Probably others have been placed in the same position by the Society's headlong rush to the "almost limitless" field it seeks to hold.

* One minor difference by way of omission, however, is not unimportant to the student of literature. Glanvill's story of the Scholar Gipsy in *The Vanity of Dogmatizing*—on which Matthew Arnold based his famous poem—was not carried over into the *Scepsis Scientifica* period, but this brief narrative is accessible to everybody, as Arnold quoted it when he published his poem, and as it is quoted by every editor who reprints the poem.

* In the first edition of the Society's prospectus—to give one more example—the *Essays* of Sir William Cornwallis (edition of 1631) were listed in the section of literature published "after 1700". In the second edition of the prospectus Cornwallis does not appear at all.

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THE FAILURE OF E. R. SILL

by Newton Arvin

"'I HAVE endeavored—I have utterly failed!' How the whole miserableness of human life has been compressed into such words at the last." So begins an essay on "Failure" contributed by an undergraduate to the *Yale Literary Magazine* for October, 1860. "Boyhood of wistful dreams," it continues, "Youth of eager hope, Manhood that so resolutely labored, and then,—'I have failed utterly!' That is all. Bitter acceptation of the truth, a little patience, and it is over; God be thanked that life isn't long! But, gloomiest of the shadowy thoughts that form out of the confused past, cannot but be the reflection of all which *might* have been. A little deviation at this point or that,—such a mere touch, here or there, from a stronger hand—might have saved it all, might have gathered up into completeness all that dim-crowned future,—sunken and scattered, now, into crownless wreck."

A history of our letters might easily be written with the interplay of success-as-a-motive and failure-as-a-motive for its sole plot. Not all the characters could be lined up, without ambiguity, as in a bad novel, on one side of the conflict or the other; but the first chapter, if one began with Franklin and Jefferson and Freneau, would unmistakably announce the theme of success; and the second, with Irving and Cooper, would but introduce variations upon it. Not until a third chapter, with the appearance of Hawthorne, Poe, and Melville, would the gloomier forces come into play; and, even here, the darkness would be only partial; the sunlight of Emerson, Whitman, and Lowell would be at least a match for such shadows as these. In the last chapter or two—with their Dreisers and Andersons, their Robinsons and O'Neills—we all know how the balance would be upset, even though the conflict would continue. Our undergraduate does not belong to those later chapters, yet it is surely more than an accident that on the very eve of the Civil War—beyond which we now have to look as if across a cañon—so gifted and so susceptible a youth as Edward Rowland Sill should have taken time to consider, and have tried to render in words, the meaning of failure. If I could quote the whole of the essay, it would come out that young Sill was not at all a shoulder-shrugging pessimist; he ends, it is true, on an excellent note of strenuousness. Yet there the sad theme is, at the very least; it was really an omen on the horizon that, at such a moment—and at Cooper's alma mater—the mere chance of defeat could seem so real.

An omen, certainly, if only of a limited and personal import. For, judged in the light of all ordinary canons, Sill's own life was to end in anything but clear victory. His classmates at Yale seem to have remembered him in college not only as full of fine promise but as bent on some more than routine achievement: "Sill then and always", said

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one of them, "hungered for real distinction. Commonplace successes that tickle the vanity and fill the wants of most men had for him no attractions". From the beginning, he had aimed high; and, if he cast about longer than most men for a vocation, it was not through mere indecision so much as through a deep concern that his career should be as fruitful as possible. To see him, then, retiring at the age of forty-one from a not very conspicuous college chair in an uncongenial atmosphere—retiring partly in order to give himself to literary labors for which, by that time, he did not consider himself more than moderately gifted—is to feel that, certainly, something had gone amiss. Sill himself, at any rate, in those last four or five years (he was but forty-six when he died), resigned himself to something very like ineffectualness. You cannot escape the sense of painful anti-climax when you find him writing, to a younger correspondent, that "One must not expect to do very much more than the average"; and you are still more troubled by the remark to Miss Shinn three years before his death: "I should have made an excellent citizen of some other planet, maybe, and they got me on the wrong one". In this connection, a little essay which he wrote at about this time for the *Atlantic's* "Contributor's Club" has a curious interest. "Books of Refuge" is its title; and its point is that, as one advances in life, literature, like other things, comes to be valued not merely as promising "some increment of positive enjoyment", but as fortifying the spirit "against positive suffering". Some books, says Sill, "so quicken the flight of time as to obliterate the present moment, with all its 'gain-giving', its remorse, its too acute memory of personal mortification, its thickening Brocken-shadow of one's own unprofitableness, of whatever sort". Such a phrase as "one's own unprofitableness"—is it not a singular echo of that undergraduate essay?

Yet Sill had been a far from ineffectual teacher of English—first in Ohio, then at the Oakland High School, and later, for eight years, at the University of California—and, if he had retired prematurely, it was owing rather to ill health, and to rebellion against the spirit of a new administration, than to a conviction of his own valuelessness as a teacher. The clearest success in any practical rôle, you feel certain, would have left Sill with something to desire. It was a poet that he was meant to be, and it was as a poet that he felt he had virtually failed. There is another of his undergraduate essays that tells us what his intimate aspirations were: it is called "Vinum Daemonum", and it is of course a descant on "the sacredness of [the poet's] calling". Six years after graduation, during a short period as a divinity student at Harvard, he was writing to Holt: "I haven't had the requisite cultivation [to be a good poet]; and besides my knocking around and feeling the cold shoulder of things hasn't improved the imaginative powers—the delicacy is blunted, and the bloom gone—if they were there". But "I believe", he added, "that born into a rich Englishman's son's shoes, like all those chaps, I could have added to the world's stock of poetry". Three years later: "I suppose that if taken young and trained right I might have made a writer; but the training has certainly been wanting. I have got myself, by dint of nearly killing labor, into the shape of an almost tolerable schoolmaster, but higher than that I never shall get, till the resurrection". After his retirement, when all his time could at last be given to writing, he could not bring himself to speak of his own work seriously. "I am supposed to be entered upon a mad career of literary work," he once wrote, in a moment of troubling levity. "Have so far only written some very mild verses, suitable for nursery use in some amiable but weak-minded family." Like all men whose purposes have been foiled, Sill avenged himself by belittling the worth of what he did accomplish. Our modern psychology would see a fine symptom in the habit he confessed to of

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forgetting things he had written; and we know what the psychiatrist would make of the remark: "I hate every bit of verse I write, as soon as it is printed, and would gladly never see it again".

It was a clue to Sill's self-distrust as a writer that he shrank from challenging any estimate of himself on that ground, that he preferred not to be known mainly as a poet, and that he called himself "a teacher who occasionally wrote verses". Read the letters to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, written during the final years in Ohio at Cuyahoga Falls, and you will be irresistibly struck by the recurrence in them of a morbid insistence on anonymity: it was as if the writing of verse were a thing no grown man could openly own to, like a lingering penchant for marbles. "More and more I wish all literary work was anonymous" is a characteristic expression; and there are queer passages in which he discusses, with the *Atlantic* editor, the tenuous advantages of this, that, or the other pseudonym. He was undoubtedly sincere when he protested, "I don't feel the least fitness for a writer"; and some of those who knew him best are most willing to accept his own judgment of himself as a teacher first and a man of letters second. "The limitations of his poetry", one of his favorite students, Miss Milicent W. Shinn, writes to me, "are due . . . to the fact of his own temperament, in which the artistic was a strong element, but wholly secondary. Much of it was written almost as he would have sat down at the organ and worked off a mood or passing thought—it flowed out with what he called a 'fatal facility', without serious artistic purpose. In reading the biography, in spite of its conviction that he was primarily a man of letters, it is very evident how uncertain and self-distrustful he is over his literary work, compared with his clear convictions and resolute efficiency in teaching." Yet he came to teaching only after making trial of several other professions: during the five years that followed on Yale, Sill tried his hand at the study first of law and then of medicine; becoming an actor was, according to one friend, another project that he "very seriously considered"; and, still later, he came so close to the ministry as to spend some months, as I have said, studying theology in Cambridge. It is true that teaching had been one of his first choices for a vocation; and that, when he at length settled on it for good, it was to throw himself into the task with a delicate zeal: he was to prove, it appears, the one teacher in a hundred thousand. But he was the kind of teacher who can say: "I take a great and growing interest in being the cause of writing in others. . . . I like to help at the incubation of poets especially". Is there no hint here of something more than the passion of the born schoolmaster?

It is a question, at the end, that cannot be reduced to dialectic: you feel, or you don't, that Sill was essentially a poet, but a poet who, in a stingy soil and under the wintry light of a low sun, never quite came to his full growth. If this was true, it is easy to see why. As always, we may "blame" both the poet and the place—or the time. I shall speak of the poet himself later, but of the place and time here. Sprung from a line of Connecticut ministers and physicians, and finding himself as a grown man in the tough-minded world of the days that followed the war, Sill could never persuade himself that being a poet was full-time work for a Christian and a citizen. Born in New England, and transplanted early to California, with later sojourns in Ohio, he escaped from the hereditary pressure toward useful labor in the vineyard only to expose himself to the parching pragmatism of the Pacific Coast and the Middle West. Moreover, Sill's lifetime bridged the gap—for so many men of his temper a twilight and mournful gap—between an age of breezy if diluted faith, the age of Emerson, and an age over which lay the shadow, as it long seemed, cast by the figures of Charles Dar-

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win and Herbert Spencer. "Wandering between two worlds"—hackneyed as the phrase is, it comes first to one's lips in describing such a writer; and Sill, if he was something less than the American Arnold, was decidedly something more than the American Clough. Unable to cling to even the attenuated supernaturalism of the Unitarians, and strongly affected by Spencer's thought, even to the point of discipleship, Sill never boldly cut the cord that bound him to the long generations of godly Rowlands and Sills, or indeed to the majority of his contemporaries; and he could not cheerfully accept a universe deprived of a sanction he could not calmly dispense with. "What'll you bet we are not immortal?" he once broke out in a letter; and the jaunty phrase, trifle though it is, throws a sudden strong light on the long ordeal of a spirit *naturaliter credula*.

Such was the double conflict that had infallibly to go on in the mind of a man like Sill: on the one hand, his instincts as a man of letters at war with a conscience that harried him without pity into some form of "service" (his own word); on the other, his deep and desperate need for spiritual certainty at war with his intellectual convictions. It was, in neither case, by any means a conflict peculiar to Edward Rowland Sill; but there is no formula for these discords: in every subtle spirit they take on fresh dimensions; and you may say of Sill that he was, for American letters, the poet *par excellence* of that divided hour. Before him came Whitman; side by side with him sang Sidney Lanier, who could "heartily lay [him] a-hold on the greatness of God"; after him came a long drouth, and then the Pounds and the Eliots and the Frosts. No wonder his whole life was overcast by the shadow of a well-nigh immitigable loneliness. No wonder you come to think of him as having mainly gone it alone. "Half the weariness of my life here," he wrote from California in 1863, "consists of its terrible isolation." From Sacramento, the same year: "I am a hermit here, caring for none, cared for by none". Seven years later: "For my part, I long to 'fall in' with somebody. This picket duty is monotonous. I hanker after a shoulder on this side and the other. I can't agree in belief . . . with the 'Christian' people, nor in spirit with the Radicals, etc." During his last year at Berkeley, where he had such devoted friends, he could yet write to Holt: "I—for my part—feel a sort of vaguely lonesome desire to make a new friend or two out of the old ones—if it were possible. I *would* like to find one or two fellows who believe in something that I do—and in doing something that I believe in trying to get done. Or must we fight it out alone—solitary skirmishers—when we are come to forty year?" After the move to Cuyahoga Falls this isolation, though no more real, must have been still more acutely present to him. "The real difficulty with me," Sill wrote to Simeon Baldwin from the Ohio town, "is to get *books*. No, there is a worse one—to get *people*. But that, I suppose, we all have everywhere." "Isolation," said Carlyle, "is the sum total of wretchedness to man"; Sill must have known more than most men what those words imply. Did he, at the end, in his undergraduate phrase thank God that "life isn't long"?

He was not much known as a poet in his own day; the one volume published during his lifetime (*The Hermitage, and Other Poems*) made no great stir, though it was abused in a *Nation* review; and if, for many years, there were a few people who knew "A Fool's Prayer" and "Opportunity" through grammar-school readers, they must have constituted Sill's largest public. Mr. Robert Frost, they say, has always good words to speak of him; and Mr. Alfred Kreymborg, last year, in his history of our poetry, gave him more attention and a juster appreciation than any of the official historians have ever done. It is well that we should be reminded of his existence, for, far as he fell

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short of major utterance, Sill belongs with Emily Dickinson and Sidney Lanier in the tiny group of poets—there is no fourth!—whom, in the generation that came to maturity during the Civil War, we can still read with respect. Nothing could be more absurd than to lump him indiscriminately with the Aldriches and Stedmans and Gilders of the age. Whatever his limitations, he was not merely a gentleman who wrote with ease. Unlike the poetasters of the Century Club, Sill was not content to be a genteel echo of Wordsworth or Tennyson. His insight was partial, as I shall try to say; but he *had* insight: those others had "finish". They would not be worth this little allusion if it were not that Sill has largely been remembered by being forgotten in their company.

His work at its best has a philosophic interest and even a philosophic weight. Unlike any American poet before him, or among his contemporaries, Sill had the hardihood to express in his verse a metaphysical anxiety. It is an old story to us now, this poetry of negation; but it was not an old story sixty years ago. It took an uncommon moral refinement then to have even the glimpses which Sill had into the Waste Land. In some of his poems, you come, for the first time, upon that low painful rumble of distress and apprehension and fatigue which sounds so steadily through our modern poetry. It is possible, he saw, that the universe has no concern for man; it is possible that life has no harmonic design; it is possible that there is irreparable waste and destruction and loss. Conceivably there is more to deny than to assert. All questions may be rhetorical—and ironic. The passionate need to understand the world, to see experience as a whole, may be a special curse. One's personal fate, whatever may be true of the universe, may be—without mitigation—inglorious: "making the best of it" may be an unavoidable formula. Failure is perhaps not to be rationalized or condoned. Perhaps a man would best aim at forgetfulness, rest, or "tranquillity". "Annihilation" may be, in a modern poet's phrase, "the most beautiful word".

To characterize Sill's verse in such sentences, let me say quickly, is to give a false impression of its actual chiaroscuro. I am speaking of the areas in shadow, not of the whole picture. Sill was no Robinson, no Eliot, no Jeffers. But what is striking is that he gave so much play to negation as he did. Even in some of his boyish exercises you come upon sentiments that smack of our own twenties rather than of the American mid-century. There is an undergraduate poem called "Midnight", for example, which, after evoking a nocturnal mood of spiritual darkness, ends with these lines:

> Is it not time to tell us why we live?
> So many years we sleep, and wake, and sleep,
> While—like some Magian through the mysteries
> Leading in fear the blindfold neophyte—
> Time leads us dimly on, till angrily
> Tired life would turn and throttle its stern guide,
> Till he should tell us *whither* and *how long*.
> But Time gives back no answer, and the stars
> Burn on, cold, hushed, and changeless as before,
> And we go back baffled and stolidly
> To the old, weary, hollow-hearted world;
> To the old, endless search for life in death—
> The restless, hopeless roaming after rest.

In a much later poem, "Infirmity", a similar bewilderment gets expression, together with a more generalized bleakness of outlook: "What is the truth", it begins—

> What is the truth to believe,
> What is the right to be done?
> Caught in the webs I weave
> I halt from sun to sun.

After four stanzas in which the unweariable vitality of nature is set over against the declining energies of man, the poem ends:

> The youth of the world is fled,
> There are omens in the sky,
> Spheres that are chilled and dead,
> And the close of an age is nigh.

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The time is too short to grieve,
Or to choose, for the end is one:
And what is the truth to believe,
And what is the right to be done?

Still later, in a poem "To the Unknown Soul", the poet, speculating on the existence of some mysteriously kindred but hidden spirit, describes *himself* in these lines:

But well I know—since thou'rt my counterpart—
Thou bear'st a clouded spirit; full of doubt
And old misgiving, heaviness of heart
And loneliness of mind; long wearied out
With climbing stairs that lead to nothing sure,
With chasing lights that lure,
In the thick murk that wraps us all about.

Certainly Sill was tormented more than most men by his incapacity to see into the heart of things; more painfully haunted by doubtfulness and perplexity. There is a sonnet called "The Book of Hours", in which he figures himself as a man vainly attempting to read a tale in a language he imperfectly understands, and failing to be touched by its grace:

The Spirit of the World hath told the tale,
And tells it: and 'tis very wise and old.
But o'er the page there is a mist and veil:
I do not know the tongue in which 't is told.

Another poem, with the title "Blindfold", expresses the same failure to grow in understanding as one advances in time—the same sense of groping for what cannot be seen:

Let me loosen the fillet of clay from the shut and darkened lid,
For life is a blindfold game, and the Voice from view is hid.

Sill was even capable of turning upon himself with a bitter smile and jeering mildly at his own hesitations and alarms. The poem called "Roland", as Mr. Kreymborg has said, foreshadows both Miniver Cheevey and J. Alfred Prufrock, with a suggestion of Senlin. The Roland of the title is a spiritual hypochondriac:

A foolish creature full of fears,
He trembled for his fate,
And stood aghast to feel the earth
Swing round her dizzy freight.

With timid foot he touched each plan,
Sure that each plan would fail;
Behemoth's tread was his, it seemed,
And every bridge too frail.

The world, to Roland, is a cell in which man is mercilessly caged and left to die; the dark for him is full of fanciful dangers.—

The buds that broke their hearts to give
New odors to the air
He saw not; but he caught the scent
Of dead leaves everywhere.

Roland is not allowed by the poet to let negation have the last word, but it is easy to imagine for what purposes of personal reproof the poem was written.

Such ironies as this are rare in Sill's work; and our whole picture would be less than faithful without at least an allusion to a few poems in which his most serious reservations are recorded. "The Blotted Page", for example, represents the poet as being allowed by the Recording Angel to delete three things from the page on which his account is kept; but the poet, trying to make a choice, sees nothing that is worth saving, and protests that the whole might better be blotted out. In "Two Views of It", a man falling from a cliff to apparently certain death is represented as passing, in a few moments, from horror at being snatched from the "glorious world" to "dull regret"—on unexpectedly recovering consciousness—that the "dark world" has come back again. In "Truth at Last", the poet speculates whether a man ever gives up hope, at the moment of some mortal disaster, and "face[s] the grim fact, seeing it clear as day". If so, he concludes, it would be a kind of victory:

'Tis something, if at last,
Though only for a flash, a man may see
Clear-eyed the future as he sees the past,
From doubt, or fear, or hope's illusion free.

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In "The Organ", finally, Sill gave expression to his nostalgic aspiration toward fruitful harmony and his hopelessness of achieving it:

O soul, that sittest chanting dreary dirges,
Couldst thou but rise on some divine desire,
As those deep chords upon their swelling surges
Bear up the wavering voices of the choir!

But ever lurking in the heart, there lingers
The trouble of a false and jarring tone,
As some great Organ which unskilful fingers
Vex into discords when the Master's gone.

I have mentioned the poems, of course, in which Sill's untimely pessimism comes most boldly to the surface; but you might well make quite as much, to the same end, of those still more frequent poems in which is embodied, in some form or other, the longing for rest and forgetfulness. It is present conspicuously in the undergraduate lines I have quoted; and the very titles of six or eight poems betray the prevalence of the mood: "Serenity", "Sleeping", "A Prayer for Peace", "Tranquillity", "Peace", "A Resting-Place", "Desire of Sleep", "My Peace Thou Art", and "Night and Peace". Two or three of these poems have a spontaneity and at the same time a formal perfection that Sill did not elsewhere go beyond: you feel somehow that no theme was quite so intimate or so continuously present to him as this. But it is not only in these poems that the desire for repose finds utterance. A poem entitled "The Things that Will Not Die", which as a whole is almost as unsatisfactory as the banal title would suggest, helps us to round out our view of the man, in this connection, very memorably. He represents himself, at the verge of death, turning without reluctance from the earth; and adds, at the end:

But they who love me best
Will be most glad
That such a long unquiet now has had,
At last, a gift of perfect peace and rest.

Sill was not the first poet, nor the last, who could strongly desire, at least at times, only the cessation of desire.

It was not in his temperament, however, to be either so much or so little as a poet of thorough-going negation. On one level his stature is enhanced, if on another it is diminished, by the repeated attempts he made to get beyond doubt, to see chagrin and failure in a larger frame, to arrive at some positiveness of view and of expression. At the very least, it can be said of Sill that he was too clear-eyed and too austere to be content with the sentimentalism of Futility. Something tough, arduous, and manly in his New England ancestry kept him from conceding the last foot to spiritual relaxation. Again and again, you find him, in particular poems, straightening himself with what seems almost a bodily motion from a posture of despair, and forcing into his voice the tones of affirmation. Sometimes this yea-saying takes the form of a Transcendental strenuousness; everyone who has even heard of Sill remembers the king's son, in "Opportunity", who finds the broken sword on the battle-field, flung there in despair by a coward, and brandishing it with a battle-shout,

Hewed his enemy down,
And saved a great cause that heroic day.

Similar calls to action are sounded in other poems. They always, however, ring with a less personal truth than the affirmations which take the form of a quietistic suspension of scrutiny, an "as if" recommendation to provisional faith. *Perhaps* there is a meaning behind the veil; behave, at least, as if there were one, and all will be well. It is this decision that Roland comes to:

Till on a day he came to know
He had not made the world;
That if he slept, as when he ran,
Each onward planet whirled. . .

The weary doubt if all is good,
The doubt if all is ill,
He left to Him who leaves to us
To know that all is well.

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So, in "The Secret", after recording a vain search for a meaning formerly apprehended, and suddenly rediscovered not directly but obliquely in self-forgetful labor, Sill concludes:

> The blessing came because it was not sought;
> There was no care if thou wert blest or not:
> The beauty and the wonder all thy thought,—
> Thyself forgot.

And the same solution is in "A Reply":

> Child! it is not thine to see
> Why at all thy life should be,
> Wherefore thou must thus abide,
> Foiled, repulsed, unsatisfied . . .
> Careless what shall come to thee,
> Look but what thy work shall be.

Elsewhere the positive line leads rather to a mild Wordsworthian nature-worship or a fugitive pantheism. This is hardly to say more, perhaps, than that Sill was a nineteenth-century poet; that he too was prepared to protest: "I love not man the less, but nature more". Yet this much at least *can* be said; and, indeed, the undertones of weariness in his verse give his allusions to natural life a warmth and intimacy that are not merely of the convention. He seems to have brought himself into a real relation especially with the massive beauty of the north-California landscape; and he has some delicate poems about the upland meadows and the mountains and the redwoods. Occasionally he even managed to adopt the stale mythology of the "Earth-Mother" and the like; but you feel that it was without much freshness of conviction.

And, in short, you have only to follow him sympathetically in his attempt to see things as a whole, to rise above the partiality of the pessimist, in order to see why Sill's stature as a poet is no greater than it is. I said just now that his figure grows in dignity as you watch him resisting the temptation to complete surrender; but it is a moral dignity, in the limited sense, that it gains: it is not the dignity of the victorious imagination. If he had been a lesser man, he would have looked at pain and mortification and perplexity less honestly than he did; if he had been a greater man, he would have looked at them, and into them, and beyond them. A poet of high endowment, it goes without saying, is always a man in whom positive powers of some sort prevail; and whether these take the form of religious insight, or metaphysical penetration, or dramatic knowledge of men, or even sensuous refinement and physical buoyancy, they invigorate his work with affirmativeness and unify it from a commanding center. It is in this sense that Sill's imagination was natively a limited and partial one, and that he remains a minor writer. With a certain capacity for religious feeling, he was incapable of religious ecstasy; with a real concern for ideas, he had but little philosophic acuteness; with a temper naturally humane, he knew nothing special about men and saw nothing in them from a new angle; and his sensitive love of beauty he was unable to erect into a ruling principle. He was a true enough New Englander to have a natural bent toward morals, and certainly there is no reason why an interest in conduct cannot stand at the center of a poet's view of things; but Sill had not the ethical, which is to say the heroic, imagination. For *that* a man must establish some true affinity with the whole life of his time, must speak for others by speaking for himself; but Sill was out of sympathy, as we have seen—and it was inevitably so—with the real life of his period; and he could not even envisage any relevant goal toward which it might move. He was reduced, in consequence, to vacillating between acceptance and rejection; and the earmarks of that fruitless alternation are strewn over all his work.

To say that a major poet must be, in the literal sense, a poet of affirmation, is to turn your back on the great pessimists; there is of course no reason why the sense of destruction and despair cannot be translated

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by a poet into a consistent metaphysic. What makes the true poetry of pessimism so positive in its effect is that it comes from men who go the whole way with their tragic vision, who are willing to put pain and defeat at the center of their world and relate the rest of experience to it. Conceivably Sill might have been the Leopardi or the Heine or the Hardy of American letters in his time. But he had, as we have seen, too much virility of one kind, too little of another, to trust his own perceptions as fully as, for this, he would have had to do. As a result, to borrow the Frenchman's remark about Browning, his center was not in the middle. He moved back and forth between darkness and light, but he established no balance between them. You are reminded of what Swinburne said, I think apropos of Matthew Arnold: "Nothing is to be made by a poet out of half-hearted or double-hearted doubts or creeds: nothing out of mere dejection and misty mental weather. Tempest or calm you may put to use, but hardly a flat fog". There is a too prevailing mistiness in the weather of Sill's poetic world; and his brave attempts at affirmation fail to dispel it. His strenuousness is morally admirable, but it is vague and conscientious and impersonal. His recommendations to patient faith and unquestioning dutifulness have a suspicious quaver in them: you feel him whistling to reassure his own heart. Even his invocation of natural presences falls short of having the emphasis of ingenuous pantheism; the "one impulse from the vernal wood" never spoke to him, after all, with clear and single authority. He went too far not to have gone much farther; he saw more, alas, than he was ever willing to report. It is on this ground that he may be said to have failed, comparatively, as a poet, just as he failed, in a less real sense, as a man.

Yet "failure" is a poor word at best to use of such a man and such a writer; and to end with a mere reservation would be to do violence to your natural esteem for the finest part of Sill's poetry. Indeed, it is exactly because he was so much more than just another cultivated and facile verse-writer that his work proposes such questions at all. His poems may have been written, as Miss Shinn says, "without serious artistic purpose"; but the best of them do not have the air of improvisation. It is true that no one should go to Sill's poetry for imagery of a passionate hardness or for the utmost density of phrase and line; true too that no one should go to him for sweep and sonority. His endowment was neither that of Sidney Lanier nor that of Emily Dickinson. Certainly his note is the note of unhurried gravity: he challenges comparison, if with anyone, with the Wordsworths and Lamartines and Arnolds of his century; and his occasional union of warmth and sobriety is not unworthy of the parallel. Gravity is not to be mistaken for tameness; and, at his most characteristic, Sill is a disciplined poet, not a tame one. A score of his pieces are the fruit of genuine insights, genuine gleams of perception, genuine purities of feeling; they were certainly written in states of mental clarity and collectedness; they have the inner soundness of organization that Emerson was pointing to when he said: "Ask the fact for the form". He had need of subjecting his imagination to a private discipline, for he chose to say things that were not being generally said around him; it was not until another generation had elapsed that American poets could go the whole distance along the road he indicated. You feel that he alone, of the serious writers of his day in America, would have been at home in our milieu as he could never be in his own. This is naturally not the ultimate tribute to what he achieved, but it largely accounts for the special pleasure with which he can be read. He should not be left to the catalogue and the text-book.

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THE FIRST CALIFORNIAN AUTHORS

by Charles Caldwell Dobie

THE HISTORY of Pacific Coast literature, or, more properly, the history of authorship provoked by the Pacific Coast begins with the reactions of Bayard Taylor, Mark Twain and Bret Harte to that land's peculiar qualities. In thinking of a literature typically Far Western, it will be well to keep in mind the distinction implied in the opening sentence. A national or sectional literature springs from within, it achieves an orderly birth, it has a steady and well-defined growth, there is inherent in it certain traits and tendencies that give it form and color and a genius peculiar to itself. As some one has said, the literary annals of a people are like the skeleton of a gigantic animal, from which the observer reconstructs a race. To date, the literature that has come out of the Pacific Coast has deposited a handful of unrelated bones that might fit into the skeletons of the varying sections which derived them but which contribute nothing to an outline of a definite society, although their very disassociation is illuminating. Thus, Mark Twain's *Roughing It* is more a document of the author's genesis than the land which inspired it, and the sentimental reactions of Bret Harte to the California scene uncover influences quite at odds with the background he sought to interpret. *A Tale of Two Cities* remains English literature despite its French background just as Conrad's stories of the sea are *not* English literature for all the language in which they are written.

In the nature of things the writing that has come out of the Pacific Coast and is still coming out of the Pacific Coast must, of necessity, have a rootless, a nomadic quality. Seventy-five years does not produce anything more than a scant foundation for either a society or a literature. Out of a dozen or more authors who have featured the Pacific Coast with international successes, only two —Gertrude Atherton and Jack London— were native to it. Even the man who interpreted its quality with the greatest power and originality, Frank Norris, came from other borders and spent the formative years of his life thousands of miles away from it.

But, if the foregoing is not enough to establish the fact of a Pacific Coast literature devoid of any fixed flavor, the nomadic tendencies of its writers must prove it. There is scarcely a single writer of distinction who has not moved out from the restrictions of the local scene to a wider field. Mark Twain's journalistic contribution to the literature evoked by Nevada and California was a mere five-finger exercise to later creative performances. It is a far cry from *Roughing It* to a life of Joan of Arc, and, midway in this literary pilgrimage, were to be achieved *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*. That these characters are the most authentic of the author's creations is no accident—they spring from his native soil of Missouri and therefore from the man himself.

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Bret Harte, likewise, sought to extend a literary domain that had had its beginnings on the Pacific Coast but, in his case, the broad horizon spelled disaster. When he quitted California he left his inspiration behind, but the will to be on the wing remained. He found nothing in London drawing rooms to color his pen and his failure points to an inherent defect in his genius. He could not discover life except under extraordinary conditions. It had taken the stimulus of a bizarre environment to set his talents in motion. The result must ever be a distorted creative picture of the times but since it is the only creative picture we have it will doubtless live long past its merit.

Speculation upon what might have been is always fruitless and yet the temptation to conjecture the effect of the gold rush upon a greater realist than Harte is hard to forego. Would the result have been nearer the truth or further from it? Perhaps the very fact that Harte chose to be a disciple of Dickens is a better commentary on the temper of his day and age than an output of broad literary creation. The times were incurably sentimental in spite of evidence on every hand of sterner qualities in life. Even Bayard Taylor's *Eldorado*, pure journalism though it purports to be, gives us many a rounded corner to the sharp angles of existence.

The truth is that America was still under the thrall of England in matters of culture and London was the Mecca of every literary demi-god. California writers, especially, aspired to this Holy Land where, it must be confessed, they received flattering attention. As late as the eighties and early nineties that diverting old humbug, Joaquin Miller, was thrilling Mayfair with his seven-league boots and his red bandanna handkerchief, Gertrude Atherton was ensnaring London with her wit and beauty, and Ambrose Bierce, under the spell of Albion, had temporarily forgotten that the chief end of a journalistic bloodhound was the baiting of rodents.

But, whatever the merits or demerits and the Taylor-Twain-Harte reactions to the synthetic life of mining camp and bawdy town, their exodus from such inspirations was succeeded by a literary drought. Occasionally a Stevenson paused long enough to chisel fresh platitudes against the land's inherent romance and to provide postcard manufacturers with innumerable adobe dwellings in which he was suspected to have laid his distinguished head, but for the most part all else is silence. Whatever vigor the writing craft possessed seemed to have been turned into journalistic channels. Creation was at a low ebb. The country was still immensely diverting but its changing quality was smothered under the literary tradition of the gold rush, due to the fact that Bret Harte had set a pattern which those who came after had not the strength to abandon. Of poetry there was none, unless one excepts the roughshod verse of Joaquin Miller. As for the drama—it did not exist.

San Francisco, the hub of cultural life on the Pacific Coast, as well as its bawdiest town, made great pretensions toward literary inclinations but they remained mostly pretensions gasping under a welter of bombastic verse and equally bombastic prose. Into this fetid atmosphere of lush authorship a literary bomb was one day hurled. A young woman, bored by the Castilian household held over from the old régime into which she had married, conceived the idea of turning a social history of San Francisco into fiction. The result appeared anonymously in the columns of a local weekly, the *Argonaut*, so thinly disguised that everybody guessed the source of its inspiration. It was a sordid story without any outstanding literary merit save one —a ruthless candor. Anything approaching truth in fiction was a new idea to a community wallowing in romantic complacency; immediately this tale provoked the thing dearest to the heart of an author—discussion. When it became known that it had been written by Gertrude, the wife of George Henry Bowen Atherton, another sensation occurred.

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The novel, published first under the name of *Randolphs of Redwood*, and, later, under the more significant title of *A Daughter of the Vine*, viewed critically, is not in itself a piece of outstanding literature. It is the work of a novice not yet trained in her art. But its value lies in the fact that it was the first realistic novel to come out of the Pacific Coast. Later, Gertrude Atherton was to do a romantic service to letters and her state by reconstructing the vanished Castilian era of the "splendid idle forties". Still later, she was to smash this very legend of the romantic infallibility of Spain that she had helped to create. But, in the end, she was to go the way of all Pacific Coast literary flesh: she was to desert the Californian scene almost entirely. One can perhaps explain the transient interest a land has for mere sojourners but what is the explanation of this desertion by a writer to the background born? Merely this: the nomadic impulse is not strangled in a single generation. Gertrude Atherton's forebears had drifted from Holland to France to New England to New Orleans to San Francisco: roots had long ceased to be a part of their racial memory.

It is singular that the years between the Twain-Harte era and the appearance of Gertrude Atherton's first story should have yielded so little in the way of creative literature. But, if no novelist or teller of tales had been endowed with sufficient genius to impress this day and generation at least the fame of one journalist, Ambrose Bierce, overleapt a continent and landed in the heart of literary London. Mr. Bierce was a native of Indiana and a product of the disillusionment of war. If one imagines that cynicism engendered by armed conflict is something new, let him read the journalistic vituperation of Ambrose Bierce preserved between the covers of books. It is apparent as one glances over this devastating output that the Pacific Coast is merely Mr. Bierce's target—the venom-tipped satire speeds out of experience far removed from sojourn in a land that H. L. Mencken once declared too soft and easy of conquest to produce a great literature. Indeed, there is something about this self-righteous indignation that smacks of witch-baiting—it is Billy Sunday assaulting the devil with literary finesse. Later on, Ambrose Bierce and some of his journalistic contemporaries, notably W. C. Morrow, were to essay the creative. But their work was informed with a spirit far removed from the California in which they were accomplished. Short stories of precise artificiality out of Poe and the Civil War have nothing in common with the ferment of a commonwealth in the making. Whatever else may be the virtue of these over-plotted tales, they are, so far as the Pacific Coast is concerned a bastard culture which never took. They may be *from* California but they are not *of* it.

Craftsmen of minor importance but acknowledged sincerity often achieve authentic creative documents of value, but the lesser writers of this sterile period in Pacific Coast letters were wallowing either in the slime of sentimentality or beating up frothy picaroon meringues. The land was a land of romance, undoubtedly, but its romance went deeper than a surface of high-heeled boots, jangling spurs, gold nuggets, Chinese opium dens and ox-eyed senoritas. Here was a polyglot civilization attempting to fuse into coherence—a thousand jarring notes reaching toward order and lucidity. But if any writer existed who discerned the struggle he held his peace. The fault lay undoubtedly in the temper of the period—America wanted jig-saw ornament on its art as well as on its furniture. Added to this, the literary canvas of the Pacific slope was too large for its piddling artists to cover, so they contented themselves with painting pink roses upon tea-cups. This was the era that produced Charles Warren Stoddard and his graceful prose, which remains just that and little else, and refined finishing-school romances, like Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, that still provide Chambers of Commerce and postcard

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dealers with blurbing ammunition. The great need of the period was a writer who could perceive reality in romance and romance in reality. It was not until the nineties that such a writer appeared upon the western scene. His name was Frank Norris.

Frank Norris was not in any sense a product of the California upon which he sharpened his bright sword of a literary genius. To be honest, he came out of that perennial target for yokel wit turned sophisticated—Chicago. Back of that lay a mixed Puritan and Cavalier heritage. His first glimpse of California was as a boy in his teens when the family moved to San Francisco. But he was soon to be on the wing again. A talent for art sent him to the Latin Quarter of Paris, from which he emerged, somewhat before he had turned twenty, with sideburns, an uncanny knowledge of medieval armor and a gargantuan literary urge which had expressed itself in a series of unrestrained military romances scribbled for the entertainment of a younger brother.

No figure could have been farther removed from the scene which he was later to interpret with such astounding vigor than this temporarily expatriated youth, returning in frock coat and spats to astonish the natives of sand-lot San Francisco. Doubtless it was this very detachment that give him such a clear vision for perceiving the gold mine of literature that others closer to the locale had overlooked. Stumbling upon Zola during his college years at the University of California, he responded with all the enthusiasm of an ardent nature to a new literary influence. At once he conceived the California scene treated in ruthless terms. Near his home was an outwardly commonplace shopping thoroughfare called Polk street. Immediately the budding young author seized upon this street as the scene of a novel. In place of gentlemen bandits, dance-hall girls and the soft chime of mission bells he filled his stage with a quack dentist, a murdered charwoman and the clang of cable-cars. This story, *McTeague*, is sordid enough in all conscience, but it is likewise full of sound drama and the romance of submerged life which only an artist can uncover. Written at the age of twenty-one, it established its author as something more than a writer of promise.

Unlike Bret Harte, Frank Norris, in any background, would have been a writer. He was an instinctive artist who knew truths without digging for them. It is ever to the Pacific Coast's advantage that circumstances made him one of its citizens at the beginning of his career. His other books—*Vandover and the Brute*, *Blix*, *Moran of the Lady Letty*, *The Octopus*—never achieve, perhaps, quite the power of his first effort, *McTeague*, but they established California as a real locale instead of a fabulous island lapped by seas of caramel "goo".

Frank Norris died at a lamentably early age with the surface of his power merely scratched. Yet, had he lived, there is every reason to fancy that he would have been dead to the Pacific Coast scene. His last book with a California background, *The Octopus*, was written as a prelude to a drama of bread and hunger which he purposed. *The Pit* took the drama away from Pacific shores to Chicago. *The Wolf* was to have jumped even the American background. Besides *The Wolf*, which death destroyed, there was, stirring in his mind when he died, a trilogy of the Civil War. It seems therefore reasonable to conclude that Frank Norris was in a fair way to turn his back upon the land that had first inspired him. Again the nomadic impulse had triumphed.

The Frank Norris period in the late nineties and early nineteen-hundreds, yielded, perhaps, one of the richest harvests for the Far-Western tradition. Not that the Frank Norris manner informed the literary output, particularly. As is so often the case in any renaissance, several figures appeared at the same time, of arresting originality and power, quite independent of one another.

These were the days that brought forth

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Jack London and Mary Austin. It was the era that exploited Gelett Burgess and his "Purple Cow" in the pages of the whimsical *Lark*. It launched the Irwins—Will and Wallace. It was the literary undergraduate years, so to speak, for Charles G. and Kathleen Norris. It was preparing the pages of the popular magazines for Stewart Edward White, Peter B. Kyne and "Jimmy" Hopper. Miriam Michelson's sprightly *In the Bishop's Carriage* came out of San Francisco during these years and Ruth Comfort Mitchell was breaking into print. Indeed, there were issues of the *Saturday Evening Post* when three-quarters of the contributors hailed from the Pacific Coast. There was nothing "typical" about this literary fare in the sense of belonging to a specified classification. It ranged from nonsense verses with a dash of *Yellow Book* sophistication, *à la* Burgess, to the strong he-male socialism of Jack London.

At Coppa's Restaurant in San Francisco's old Montgomery Block, George Sterling nightly wrapped spaghetti around his fork and spilled red wine upon the saw-dust floor while the great unwashed took side tables to view Bohemia at play. Jack London sat at this round table, and the copper-haired Hopper. . . . The Bierce tradition had begun to die, in spite of the fact that George Sterling, in need of the discipline of a literary despot, still offered up incense before the shrine of his mentor who had escaped to Washington. Herman Scheffauer, another sonorous poet who had been flogged into creation by the irascible Bierce, was already heading toward Germany and a recaptured Teutonic heritage and away from the scene of his early inspiration.

From the aforementioned round table of San Francisco's literary Bohemia sprang the Carmel colony. There was a great deal in the Carmel tradition that was empty sound and fury, but, on the other hand, much that was fine sprang from it. Sterling became one of the strongest assets in its bid for a valid reputation, to be succeeded by Robinson Jeffers, to whom Sterling generously yielded his poetic sceptre.

In the late nineties, Edwin Markham's *The Man With the Hoe* was sweeping the country, although Markham more properly belonged to the preceding generation, and Ina Coolbrith was still lifting a lyric voice. Altogether, at this period, the quality of the Pacific Coast's major and minor writers in journalism, in fiction, in poetry—in every field of authorship save the drama—was of a high order. Never before had the future held such promise for the foundation of a recognized school of Pacific Coast letters. But events were stirring which were to destroy nearly every vestige of a culminative sectional literature. It was the day of tremendous expansion in periodical circles. New York was calling and the literary nomads of the West responded. One by one they folded their tents. And, as if this were not enough, came an earthquake to reduce the circle further. For a season dismayed groups fled San Francisco and took a last stand at Carmel. But disruption had set in. The Irwins were gone, the Norrises, Charles and Kathleen, were going, Mary Austin was planning a retreat. Only Jack London and George Sterling remained, and London long since had made creative excursions away from western backgrounds.

In looking over the names which crowded this era of activity in authorship one is inclined to place Mary Austin at the head of the list for having distilled the essence of background more successfully than any other. In 1903, Houghton Mifflin brought out a book of sketches called *The Land of Little Rain*. This book was the result of the observations, rendered in terms of creative beauty, of a woman fundamentally an observer and a naturalist. For ten years her existence had been chained to the outward monotony of the desert. The ordinary woman would have gone either sour or mad in such an environment but Mrs. Austin developed into a supreme artist under her experience.

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Perhaps the reason that these sketches strike so at the heart of the land is because the human element in them is merely an accent against a landscape limitless and untamed. The human fret called life which in the fifties swept over the Rockies in a mad rush for gold sprang from other boundaries and other dusts. Even after seventy-five years the human element is still curiously unrelated, unwedded to the Far-Western background—curiously unrelated, unwedded, if you will, to itself. It is still a civilization in ferment, it still ebbs and flows. Only the land is unchangeable, inscrutable. Mary Austin interprets this land and the inhabitants which belong to it—hawks and buzzards and coyotes, and furry things making their nocturnal way to infrequent water courses, and lupines ruffling in a spring wind. Occasionally she draws a human figure across the sunburnt stage—a widowed squaw fending for her male child; an incompetent medicine man sitting apart from the tribe waiting for his doom to be pronounced; a white pocket hunter, blue-eyed and mildly mad, searching for gold. Sheep and shepherds pass in review, vaqueros in twos and threes ride away in a cloud of alkali dust to fandangos under a grape arbor. But the stage is never crowded with human kind. The keenness of Mrs. Austin's observations is matched only by the beauty of her style; infused with a strong scriptural tang, it brings new beauties to its Elizabethan heritage. If the claim of Remy de Gourmont is valid, that style is the element that makes a piece of literature survive, then Mary Austin's sketches of the rainless country will live beyond anything else that the West has produced.

Two other authors in the naturalistic field have made sound contributions to the written word concerning the open spaces—Clarence King and John Muir. But, in both cases, the scientific mind overshadows the creative, and Mr. King, at least, suffers from the ornate and artificial style of the florid seventies. Mr. Muir is simpler, but neither of these two gentlemen can touch the nice balance between nature and art that informs the work of Mrs. Austin.

George West, in the columns of *The American Mercury*, made the statement that writing groups of the Pacific Coast at the present time are composed mainly of old ladies with one book to their credit. This is undoubtedly a journalistic exaggeration if not a peevish one, but it contains a grain of truth. A fresh crop of writers appears from time to time, but Fords and trains and flying machines run too frequently toward the editorial Meccas of New York for the establishment of a strong sectional literature. The result is that present Pacific Coast authors belong to the general American scene rather than to the community that produced them. In many cases they do not stay long enough in their nests to so much as investigate their birthright.

With the present outlook so fitful the future is shrouded in equal uncertainty. That writers will continue to pour forth from the land there is no doubt, but that they will have a strong sectional flavor is open to conjecture. Ebb and flow within its borders goes on unceasingly and, added to this fluid state of society, is the standardization of American life—all life, in fact—by the mechanical agencies which abridge distances. It may be that the day of provincial literature is drawing to a close everywhere. In the extreme south of the Pacific Coast a veritable horde from Kansas, Iowa and other middle western states has submerged the earlier settlers who, left to themselves, might have been on their way to founding a definite civilization and, by the same token, a literature with a distinct tang and flavor. As it is, the present inhabitants are performing their best corn-belt antics against a totally unrelated stage-set, very much as the immigrants who descended upon the more northern sections did seventy-odd years previously.

Today, gauging the temper of the people, one is moved to fancy that if the Pacific

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Coast in the future achieves a strikingly sectional phase of literature it will be in the drama. Its background, its settlers, and its history are infused with the dramatic principle. The poetic drama does not for the moment seem to be an expression of the times. Had it been, it might have given the West its voice. George Sterling's two dramatic poems done near the close of his career, *Truth* and *Lilith*, point in that direction, and all of Robinson Jeffers's narrative poems are drama in their essence. Perhaps that is why the overworked adjective "Greek" has been applied to them. But even these two precursors of what may be the ultimate destiny of Western literature have roots that strike into a racial past shaped by other times and exigencies. Neither was to the land born. They are like trees sprung from a bleak mountain-top and transplanted to a sunny sheltered grove. They have achieved a thick verdure, but the stress of an early wind and weather is still upon their twisted branches.

With such a strong undercurrent of drama in the background of the West it is strange that to date it has contributed so little of value to the commercial stage. Its Belascos and its Tullys have given us dramatic confections but nothing of real depth. The only Pacific Coast drama that ever has received serious consideration is Sidney Coe Howard's *They Knew What They Wanted*. Mr. Howard's play may be dramatic entertainment but it is in no sense a contribution to the American scene, much less the Californian. It would take too long to catalogue its inconsistencies, but an Italian vineyardist over fifty years old without a wife is an incredible creation. He would have had one from economic necessity if for no other reason.

With this scarcity of dramatic achievement in the past it is pertinent to inquire why there should be any hope that the future may be rich in this field of creative endeavor. The answer lies in the inclination of the people themselves to participate in all forms of drama. Plays in redwood forest and oak grove, plays upon hillside and mountain, plays in woodland theatre and Greek stadium—from April until October pageant succeeds pageant. Social clubs, fraternal organizations, women's groups, school children —all seem seized with this desire to express themselves in terms of drama. It is impossible, of course, to expect Art to spring full-grown from the Jovian head of a Rotary Club civilization, but the urge is there, the germ is fermenting.

The drama of the Pacific Coast will not be the drama of the confined stage, perhaps. It will not be the pathological drama of the O'Neill school. It will be a drama of movement and color and sonorous phrases against far-flung backgrounds. And it seems reasonable to expect that this form of dramatic composition, with its processionals, its dances, its fluid phrases, will express the flow of life, the restless questing, the nomadic quality of the past, the present and what promised to be the immediate future of Pacific Coast life.

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ON NOT HAVING READ JAMES BRANCH CABELL

by Harlan Hatcher

I HAVE never read any of Mr. Cabell's books. I regret this. I am missing an experience which has moved many of my contemporaries. I have tried, as befits a serious mind interested in letters, to overcome the deficiency. The Cabellians among my acquaintances have always seemed to me reasonably sane, as human beings go. For the judgments of some of them I have respect. They have reported to me that Mr. Cabell is one of the creative minds of our day; that he can tell a tale with the best of them; that he is a man who knows something about Eve; that he has created a new country called Poictesme and peopled it with a new generation of men sprung from the stout loins of Count Manuel. They have told me that he is a great poet, and that his poetic symbolism has thrilled them with its beauty. I must believe them, for it is plain that they have been affected. They have told me that he is an incomparable stylist; that the music of his words is like the sweet influence of the Pleiades. And they declare that if one has not journeyed through Poictesme and felt himself at home among its bushes, its swords, and its midnight talks in hidden places, he is untravelled in the golden realm of Apollo.

I have journeyed somewhat among the western islands. I am a traveller who would on such recommendation speed post-haste to view with enthusiasm a new kingdom. I engaged passage on several boats and prepared myself to stare at the Pacific. Imagine my disappointment when these capital ships which looked perfectly seaworthy became waterlogged and were forced to put in this side the magic land. I was distressed, I made other attempts. I have often embarked during the past ten years, but I have never made a crossing. I have just returned from my last miscarriage. Something there is that tells me I shall never see Poictesme in the light of its sun and moon and stars; that I shall never see the eagle's shadow above the high place at the certain hour; that I shall never examine the nature of the rivet in grandfather's neck.

Once, indeed, I almost caught sight of the new world and felt myself on the threshold of an authentic experience. I had been trying *Jurgen* again. Ordinarily I compromised on Wednesday; once I deferred the compromise to Glathion. It had always been a compromise; there are so many compromises in Mr. Cabell's work. This time I did the manly thing. I fought my way bravely to the island of Cocaigne and paused in a becoming state of reverence at the prie-dieu before St. Cosmo's shrine in Anaïtis's chapel for the ceremony of the Pink Veil. Here, surely, I said hopefully to Psyche, we shall find the poet we have long sought in vain. From this holy temple we shall enter and possess the land. We bowed breathlessly to hear the voice recite the ritual. We prayed that it would this one time not falter and we would become its followers.

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"O secret of all things, hidden in the being of all which lives . . ."

(It was indeed the celestial voice.)

"I am the flame that burns in every beating heart, and in the core of the farthest star. I too am life and the giver of life."

I saw in imagination the glimmering domes and pinnacles of the land I had come to seek.

At that point in the holy service, may God forgive, the voice of the high priest cracked; a squeaky-toned eunuch broke into the ritual and bleated out through his hood, "So be it! but as you are, so once was I"; two naked children trembled by the altar; the candles sputtered and stank; and the sunlit turrets I thought I had glimpsed shattered into red-pointed lances and broken triangles. I departed the temple with a sad heart, knowing I should not again return. It is no good, I said to Psyche. Mr. Cabell is not for us. He is not even an acolyte in the procession of the Children of Adam.

As one, then, who has tried unsuccessfully to journey into the land of Poictesme, I submit this brief log of my failure. I regretfully confess that I have failed to find convincing evidence of the creative genius with which Mr. Cabell is charged. For a Virginia genealogist to imagine Count Manuel of Poictesme projecting a line of offspring is not, I should imagine, a fatiguing exercise. Many humble Americans of rude birth have invented for themselves ancestral trees. Neither, I presume, is it especially difficult to conceive of a son re-enacting the deeds of his sire and grandsire. So far as I have been able to observe, these deeds consist for the most part in those exercises which imbeciles and morons seem to perform with no less success than the noble Count. And it is my observation that a reasonably successful travelling-man can keep the same tale moving easily through variations and shifting scenery from Richmond, Virginia, to New York City without seriously tasking his parts. His tale should not, of course, be expected to reach such great heights of creative imagination as that noble scene before the door of Dame Anaïtis's bedroom in which Jurgen attempts to comfort Queen Silvia who had been dead only a bare sixty-three years. And Mr. Cabell does create an imposing bibliography.

Mr. Cabell tells that life is comedy and the actors all alike except in costume. I am not inclined to deny the discovery. I had even suspected it before I read it in Shakespeare and Ecclesiastes. But if it is truth, it should be artistically set forth in a pattern equally comic. I have searched for this rare quality in my attempts to admire Mr. Cabell. I do not find it; instead I find "The Profits of Paper-selling". I have come reluctantly to suspect that the comedy of Mr. Cabell is not cosmic in tone or proportion.

I am told that Mr. Cabell is one of the great story-tellers. I cannot believe it because it is contrary to my experience. His tales simply do not soar into the pure serene because they are overloaded with freight. One would be willing to carry the baggage if it made the journey to Poictesme (as it does to Lilliput or Folly Down) any happier, or if the journey were really worth the making. It is my belief that neither is true. For each page of the celestial flame in Mr. Cabell's books I find a score of smoke and ashes. The machinery is simply too heavy. It lames the Silver Stallion in the first dozen pages, and puts him *hors de combat* on page 141 in "the grumbler's progress". It crushes the *Figures of Earth* on page 72 under "the feather of love". It prevents *Domnei* from being one of our contemporary masterpieces with "a beauty finely escaping the dusty confusion of any present". Were the books of a quality just a little more rare, had they an uncommon tale to tell, they might qualify, along with *Gulliver's Travels*, as children's literature. Little folks love machinery. For an adult mind to get excited over Poictesme would be like having an enthusiasm for Barnaby Googe and pastoral poetry. I regret

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that Mr. Cabell has buried from me his grains of wheat in the enormous pile of chaff which is Poictesme. The first sixty-three pages of *Beyond Life* and the essay on Marlowe are worth more than the whole Kingdom.

I have looked in vain for the beauty of his poetic symbolism. Sometimes I have seen it glow for an instant, but always with the after sensation of disappointment. I know he has rare gifts, for I have seen them. But he seems to think that his symbols to be understood must be vulgarized. I am not worried over the moral state of any of his rare rogues. I take my Rabelais straight, with all ribbons, codpieces, and goosenecks unbowdlerized. But Rabelais never mocks a reader by taking him into a temple only to splash holy water on his back.

There is also a fatiguing monotony about Mr. Cabell's symbolism. The lusty swords, the upright lances, the daggers, the candles, the mathematical demonstrations, the talks, the comfortings, the church spires—surely I am not entirely wrong in thinking of these things as slightly juvenile. The fine things he has to say in *Figures of Earth* are unnecessarily allegorized in symbols that are not compelling enough to lead one on. The symbolical world into which he escapes seems to me no more desirable to contemplate than the one he flies. I have respect for Cabellians. But I cannot choose but suspect that they have sometimes confused the ancient and childish pastime of interpreting symbols and solving puzzles with the finer art of creative reading and writing. Mr. Cabell gives to very young college children (they are his largest audience) the illusion of discovery in the realm of sex. Naturally they are moved. But it is not the authentic thrill of Keats discovering Edmund Spenser. It is rather the detective work of learning how to read Browning's Dramatic Monologues. The sensation of discovering the hidden meaning makes them unaware that the interest is really in the discovery, and that the meaning was not finally important.

My final disqualification as a cupbearer to the Lords of the Silver Stallion is another of my regrets. I barely whisper it in private, but already I hear rattling the swords of the guardsmen. I do not find Mr. Cabell the master of a beautiful prose style. This is, I recognize, a serious confession, for I have been told on good authority that Mr. Cabell follows beauty wherever she leads him, and writes about her with virtual perfection.

I hold that this quest is the most noble that man can pursue, and that to write with even virtual perfection is a lovely and a painfully difficult art. Imagine my unhappiness to be told where beauty dwelleth and to find only an empty cave. A few times I have seen the footprints of the Goddess, and heard her mighty sandals slipping over the stones on the road to Poictesme.

> Thus about sunset Demetrios waited the ship's coming, alone upon the Needle. This promontory is like a Titan's finger of black rock thrust into the water. The day was perishing, and the querulous sea before Demetrios was an unresting welter of gold and blood.

Without question Mr. Cabell could have written. But, alas, the artist that might have been is buried deep under the stones and ragweeds of the most puerile effusions.

> Now the tale is no more of Gonfal, who was the first to perish of the lords of the Silver Stallion. The tale instead tells that, in the while of Gonfal's adventuring in Inis Dahut, yet three other champions of the fellowship have left Poictesme which under Dame Niafer's rule was altering day by day. Coth of the Rocks, indeed. . . .

Where were Mr. Cabell's friends and well-wishers when he was building Poictesme over such an architecture?

I saw the other day a news item which told that Mr. Cabell had completed his work and would write no more books. He was probably misquoted, but I was troubled to discover that the announcement failed to move me with regret.

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WHAT IS A FICTIONAL CHARACTER?

A DIALOGUE

by V. J. McGill

EVERY author, said Fielding, should know something about his subject, and this is a requirement to which no writer will object unless he is asked too many questions. The medical man will explain that he is writing about diseased tissues and pathological disturbances of one kind or another, while the chemist will designate his solutions or gases in the most confident manner, and neither will be surprised by the question. The historian, similarly, will be at no loss to answer, and will probably leave off his work very amiably to explain how Hamlet was a historical character and Wilhelm Tell not, how some notorious figures of the past were no men at all, while some were two, and perhaps he will prove how important such matters are. At any rate he will be able to tell us what he is talking about and won't mind doing so. The same will be true of scientists and writers in almost every field. But if we now approach the novelist in his study, the same question will ring with a certain impertinence. What are you talking about? What is your field and subject matter? No satisfactory answer will be forthcoming and no convivial chat. If we insist on our point and ask our novelist to remember that every rational discourse must have a subject matter and every sensible assertion an object, he will no doubt throw up his hands, and his eyebrows, with the avowal that his characters have no pretensions to reality, but are frankly fictional.

This, in fact, was an actual experience of mine. Being of a curious cast of mind, I went one day to a novelist I scarcely knew and put to him precisely these questions. But when he answered very complacently that his characters were only fictional, my deeper curiosity was only the more terribly enflamed. "How do you find out about fictional characters?" I asked. "How do you know that what you say about them is true? Do the critics ever object to your descriptions of these fictional characters? If so, how do *they* find out about them?" And so I put many questions of the kind very impulsively and I would never have dreamed of doing so if I hadn't been dying with curiosity, for the novelist was frankly irritated and his critic friend was sneering. "A fictional character," the novelist finally put it plainly, "is only a phantom in my imagination."

"But this is a great deal," I differed. "And where, sir, is your imagination?"

"My characters, young man, are in my own head. They are *my* characters."

"Then I don't see how other people can enjoy these same characters quite as much as you do. Do they have access to your—imagination?"

"After reading my books, yes."

"Then the world of your imagination cannot be in your head. And where, under the sun, is it?" At this point I looked around the room significantly. "Is it anywhere in physical space? Did your hero, Bainbridge

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Shotwell, save the girl in the northern hemisphere or the southern?"

"No," said the novelist unpleasantly.

"But he does save her, doesn't he?"

"You have read my book?"

"With the greatest pleasure. But I simply must know where he saved her, for such an event, even though it is imaginary, must occur in space somewhere. Shotwell and the girl were both of a size, you remember, and rather well turned at that."

"All this occurred, as I have told you, only in my imagination."

"Where, then, is your imaginary space? What direction is it from here?"

"No direction. What an idea!"

"But I thought the scene was laid in London?"

"An imaginary London, of course."

"But you mention Drury Lane, the Strand. I suppose your imaginary London just about duplicates the real London. Is it the same size?"

"Of course."

"And yet it is neither north, south, east, nor west of the real London—not in our space at all. And I suppose you would say that the moment at which Shotwell saves the girl is neither before nor after the present moment and not in our time at all, though it is temporal. I confess I don't understand this at all."

"It's quite simple, however. My imaginary world is where and what I like to make it. That is my delightful advantage." Here the critic broke his grand isolation with the remark:

"But the public often complains of your characters, you know, and your plots, they sometimes say, are unconvincing. Often, I know, you have changed an episode after an objection of mine. Are the characters in your imaginary world so subject to your whims and scruples?"

"Entirely. There I make the laws."

"But suppose," I suggested, "suppose you had stated in your novel that Burton held up the girl before Shotwell saved her but (in another place) that Shotwell really saved her before she was held up."

"Everyone would say he had simply made a mistake," cried the critic.

"And suppose," I continued, "you had said that the girl was held up before she was saved and saved before she was married, but not held up before she was married."

"Another mistake; but no one would ever make it," said the critic.

"Not in this simple form but in more complicated cases it frequently happens. That is why we have textual criticism, even of novels. For in fiction as elsewhere the ordinal laws of time and space must be observed. Even though your imaginary world is out of our time and space, you are not allowed to violate the laws." Here the critic remarked:

"But it is often said that 'there is no time in Joyce'. In *Ulysses*, you know he writes a huge volume on the occurrences of twenty-four hours and jumps back and forth in time in a most arbitrary manner."

"But this is no violation of the laws of time. A strand of time can be described in segments, if one likes, and the segments can be taken in any assignable order, but the order in which they are taken must be made clear to the reader; *i.e.*, he must be able to reconstruct the events as they occurred, for otherwise he will simply throw down the book and swear that the author is confused. With regard to the twenty-four-hour interval, this is quite permissable. Joyce has simply been able to show that the thousands of dim events on the margin of consciousness are far more interesting and significant than other novelists have supposed and so he tells about a whole day full of them. No, time is the ruler of fiction—time, space and logic. There are thousands of logical laws which are unconsciously obeyed in every novel. And then—there are other laws—laws of physics, chemistry, physiology, and so on. If an author violates these laws he is immediately put

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down as a mere romancer or an ignoramus. What would happen if a novelist should assign to his hero very poor visual imagery which prevented him from thinking of the face of any absent friend, and then explained how, when his wife returned from a long trip, he was *naturally* obliged to take her picture to the train with him in order to recognize her? The psychologists, of course, would not stand for it. They would scoff and depreciate.

"Now tell me," here I turn to the novelist, "how can you say you make the laws for your imaginary world when you submit so excellently to these others?"

"I think it is obvious that I can submit to these and still remain free for the most part."

"I should doubt that very much," I replied. "Once you have fixed upon a character in his environment, his development is pretty well determined, if not by the laws of science, then by tradition and convention. And why are you obliged to obey these laws? I think the answer is quite obvious. In your novels you never mention an imaginary world. You talk about *this* world most emphatically. Your hero may be an imaginary character, yet you have him walk about in London and talk to Lloyd George and there is no suggestion that you are referring to any world but this. Now which are you talking about? This world or the world of your imagination?"

The novelist seemed a bit testy as I put this alternative, so I added:

"You must be talking about something, you know."

"Young man," he said, stroking his historical whiskers quietly, "I must admire your perseverance in this foolish discussion. It is a quality which might carry you a long way if properly applied. I shall admit, if you like, that I have not known what I was talking about. I have always thought my novels were concerned with an imaginary world but now I suppose I must really have been talking about the actual world."

"But that," I replied with great eagerness, "is but the other horn of the dilemma. If you were writing about the real world, then everything you say is false. Your hero, Shotwell, never existed, nor his enemy, the dapper, sinister Burton, nor the girl; yet you describe them doing all sorts of things which you must admit they didn't do. Shotwell, you say, talked with Lloyd George on a certain date, but this could easily be checked up and disproved, and the same is true for your other assertions. Did you expect the public to believe such things?"

Here the novelist sighed unhappily.

"Young man," he said, "this is simply nonsense. The public knows perfectly well that these characters are only imaginary."

"But I thought you said you weren't talking about imaginary characters?"

"Well, well. What difference does it make?"

"What difference does it make what you are *talking* about?"

"Why do you ask such ridiculous questions? My friend and I were having a very pleasant chat about my character Susie, who, he says, should have refused to marry more often."

"Then you are interested in your characters, but quite bored with the problem of what they are?"

"I have told you they were mere suppositions. Why should we worry?"

"Suppositions! You have not mentioned that before. Your characters, then, are neither real nor imaginary, but suppositions. But how can you talk about suppositions? A supposititious character is no character at all—simply nothing. John Stuart Mill, you will remember, tried to treat physical objects as the mere possibility of sensation, but the attempt was unsuccessful. A physical object cannot produce sensations unless it is something in itself and your characters, similarly, cannot produce a sensation on the public unless they are something or other. Let us recall furthermore that every rational discourse

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must have a subject matter and every assertion an object—otherwise it is simply meaningless. Thus your third alternative is as bad as the others. If you maintain that your characters are mere suppositions you are but flinging yourself on the third horn of the dilemma, if, to be sure, dilemmas had three horns. Now, man to man, what are you talking about in your novels? I am so anxious to know before I read any more of them."

But the novelist had risen impatiently. My hat was in my hand. The door stood open before me. The novelist, I could see, was violently displeased and the door closed behind me angrily. "And a plague on all philosophers," I heard a loud voice cry.

I was bitterly disappointed that my inquiry should have ended so; but could only comfort myself with the remembrance of how Socrates had been much abused for his questioning and how it was a poet, Meletus, who brought the charges against him which occasioned his death. And it was a compensatory pleasure to recollect how Socrates had gone among poets looking for a wise man but had found that even of their own poetry they were the worst judges in the world. In reflecting on these matters I became convinced that novelists were barefaced liars to the man, especially the one I had just left behind me, and I determined to make him admit it on some occasion and humble him decisively. I therefore turned with great eagerness to the critical works on the novel but found here, unfortunately, nothing to aid my argument. In desperation I next read a number of standard novels but was more at sea than ever to know what they could possibly be talking about. Finally, as the weeks passed by and my sinister purpose still smouldered, though my hopes had almost failed, I found my clue in a number of familiar writings which the critics seldom mention. First there were the books of Meinong such as *Ueber Gegenstände Höhrer Ordnung*, then Bertrand Russell's brilliant article on "Denoting in Mind" and finally *Principia Mathematica*, Whitehead and Russell. Armed with the wisdom of these authorities I therefore returned to the scene of conflict determined to carry my point far better than on the last occasion.

The maid, who of course could have had no idea what I came for, admitted me at once and there I found the novelist and his critic friend, seated in quiet rumination just as before. But the confident presence of a tall bottle between them sounded a new note and gave them a formidable aspect which I had not expected. I saw at once that they were prepared for anything and that they were strong and determined men. I nevertheless took the offensive at once with:

"Have you given up that ridiculous theory of an imaginary world which you used to hold?"

"I don't see why I should if I don't want to," the novelist replied ungraciously.

"I will tell you then. Suppose you wrote a biography of Franklin."

"But I wouldn't like that, you know."

"The critics would certainly have a right to criticize the things you say about Franklin, wouldn't they?"

Here the critic gave him a glance and he assented.

"And that is because the critic knows something about Franklin, too?"

"Of course; but do you admit that the readers of your novels are acquainted with your fictitious characters just as you are?"

"How could they derive any pleasure from them if they weren't?"

"But suppose a critic acquainted with one of your characters should claim you made a mistake, that your hero wasn't really generous, as you made out, but stingy? What would you say?"

"I should be speechless."

"That wouldn't help much, for you see it would be quite possible for you to make a mistake in describing the characters in your imaginary world, just as the biographer may err in describing the characters of the real

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world. Why do critics refrain from such criticisms?"

"Because they are not mad, I suppose."

"Or, in other words, because none of them really believes in an imaginary world."

"Your argument doesn't convince me."

"Then let us turn to your own words."

"That sounds more hopeful."

"Do you know what a man is talking about from the words he uses or from his own idea of what he is talking about? How do we determine a man's meaning at law, for instance, by his actual words or by his private notion of what he means by his words?"

"By his words, naturally."

"Then if I am to judge by the words of your novels, your characters are real, for you say it by implication again and again. Thus while you think you are talking about characters in an imaginary world, you are really talking about characters in the real world. Don't you pile up circumstances to convince the reader that you are alluding to actual facts? You know very well that no one would read *your* books if you made it clear that you were talking about an imaginary world."

"All right, my characters aren't imaginary creatures, and they certainly aren't real. I say they are real but they aren't. What are they? And what of it?"

"They are nothing."

"And I am the greatest of liars."

"Not at all. It isn't so easy to lie as you think. To lie you must have an object to lie about; but your characters, as I say, are simply nothing. And to think about nothing, Parmenides said, is not to think."

"I don't believe it."

"No, perhaps not; 'nothing' has so many meanings. But wouldn't you admit Meinong's principle that everything that can be thought about, is, and hence that your characters must be something or other?"

"Sounds reasonable."

"Dear old Meinong," cried the critic.

"But this would simply lead us back to the imaginary world we have already rejected. Fortunately, therefore, this principle of Meinong's, however obvious it sounds, has now been disproved. An alternative theory has been advanced by Russell in his article on 'Denoting,' which is certainly one of the first developments in modern philosophy. In fact, it is of the utmost importance. For one thing *Principia Mathematica* could not have been written before this theory was worked out, and, thus, the deduction of mathematics from a few simple logical principles could not have been accomplished in the thorough and rigorous fashion which has made that work famous."

"But what has this to do with the characters of fiction?" snapped the critic.

"Everything," I replied, "and it is about the only thing I have found that is relevant." Here I turned sharply to the novelist and said:

"You think you can lie about Shotwell and the girl and impose upon the public and draw your royalties. It's all very simple!"

"And delightful," sighed the novelist.

"Then answer this question: If you were to say that 'the present King of France is bald' would that be a lie?"

"Certainly."

"Then I suppose that the 'the present King of France is not bald' would be the truth?"

"No, that would be false too, because, of course, there isn't any present King of France."

"But you admit that two contradictory assertions cannot both be false."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Well, then, which of these is true?"

"Neither."

"Then you can certainly see that it isn't so easy to lie about non-existent things such as the present King of France or the characters of your novels. It isn't easy to talk about them at all, or at least to know what you are talking about when you do."

"Then you maintain that what I say about my characters is simply meaningless?" in-

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quired the novelist indignantly. "Why, then, do people read my novels, I'd like to know."

"No, what you say is not meaningless. Your assertions have meaning and you know what this meaning is. But you don't, unfortunately, know how to analyze it. For it is quite possible to make a significant assertion without knowing what you are talking about, and it is quite possible to know that one assertion is true or false without knowing how to analyze its import. This is G. E. Moore's great argument against scepticism in 'A Defense of Common Sense', an article which everyone should read before commencing philosophy or anything else. Do you know that $2 + 2 = 4$?"

"Yes," said the novelist, but in a manner to suggest that it was about the only thing he did know. Indeed, he was sinking rapidly into a state of Bacchic innocence and the wonder only was that it hadn't happened before.

"But could you define the number, 2, or the operation, $+$?"

"Of course not."

"Then you don't know what a number is? What are you talking about when you make this assertion that $2 + 2 = 4$?"

"Two things added to any other two things make four things," said the novelist.

"A very good beginning. You will readily agree with Russell, I believe, that the cardinal number, 2, is the class of all classes with two and only two members and that a class with two and only two members can be defined in *Principia Mathematica* without reference to the number two?"

"Why not? It sounds unex-ception-able." He pronounced this last word with great care.

"But a class, according to Mr. Russell, is only a fiction and has no existence of any kind. And thus arithmetic and a great deal of mathematics, in fact, is concerned only with fictions, just as your novels are. Geometry, similarly, is occupied with *mathematical* points and lines, triangles, circles, and other figures, but most mathematicians are fully aware that no such things exist, either in this world or any other."

"Then what do the mathematicians talk about?" cried the novelist with a sudden throb of interest.

"Well, really, I don't think they knew, until Frege, Russell, and Whitehead had the subtlety to explain the matter. Due to their efforts, however, the assertions about fictions, so important in science, have been so analyzed and construed that they make the best sense in the world. Thus while classes do not exist we can nevertheless make all the important assertions about them we like."

"But I don't like it and it don't make sense," said the novelist with a lilt and a wave of his hand, while the critic stared at me discontentedly.

"It's quite simple, though. We can say that certain concepts, or functions, apply to x, to y, and, for that matter, to all the members of the class, though, of course, there isn't any class. Thus, whenever an assertion is made about a class, what is meant is simply that a certain concept has application. Of course I am putting it very simply."

"It sounds simple to me," said the critic, for I am afraid he, too, had lost his grasp.

"However simple you may think it, this analysis of assertions about fictions, is of the greatest importance to science which talks about fictions half the time. There we meet with types, averages and limits continually. *The* average child is described and *the* amphioxus is drawn on the blackboard for us. Indeed if we could not talk about fictions, we should not get very far in science."

"So far as I can see," said the novelist, making a remarkable recovery, "the mathematicians and the what-nots are no better off than we novelists."

"That's because you don't see straight," I replied with some heat. "The mathematicians are much better off. When we analyze the meaning of $2 + 2 = 4$ we come out, thank heaven, with a true proposition. But when

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we analyze *your* assertion, 'Shotwell folded the girl in his gorilla arms while she fluttered and beat—then subsided', we find it is utterly false. In short, I have merely explained how you can lie as you do. The possibility of that seemed very dubious a moment ago. Rather it seemed that all you could do was to babble nonsense. Now I have redeemed you and everything is explained. What you really assert in your novel is that certain concepts apply to an individual in this world—such concepts as 'having gorilla arms', 'loving the girl' and 'hating the sinister Burton'. All this is simply false, as you know very well. As a matter of fact, however, you are not an absolute liar for the public is only half deceived by your assertions and you yourself only intend to deceive them partly. As they read your novel they are *inclined* to believe—the more so, the more they are interested. But when they have finished they lay down the book and declare it was a good story or fall to criticizing your fictitious characters without knowing, of course, what they are talking about. Thus while everything you say is false you are not a complete liar, and I am sure you will be grateful to me for revealing you as you really are."

"What!" exclaimed the novelist after a moment.

"Oh," I said politely, "you mean to inquire about the so-called truth of some novels. This is analogous of course to the truth of Geometry, the Geometry we all learned at school. If a Euclidian triangle existed in this world, it would have to have all the properties which are stated in the theorems of Plane Geometry. Similarly, if your novel has truth in the sense of the expression, then all the behavior of your hero, Shotwell, must follow from his character and circumstances as first stated. If the novel ever attained to such rigor and deduced the plot from the nature of the characters and circumstances, it would be a science just as much as Geometry is. This, you know, was the ideal of Zola and his school, and was lately announced by Echegeráy. Naturally such an ideal could never be attained, for the science of fiction, as we might call it, would embrace all the other sciences which have a bearing upon human life and action. The novelist would have to be a mathematician, a physicist, an astronomer, a physiologist, a histologist, a psychologist, a bacteriologist and so on. And it is obvious that neither Zola nor Echegeráy has anything like this omniscience. However, they do approach this ideal and you, dear sir" (here I turned to the novelist), "have gone still further in this direction, it seems to me, with your splendid realism and your careful eye to plausible sequence of events. Since seeing you last, I have re-read several of your novels, and more than once sighed, 'If only he knew what he was talking about, he would be the greatest of living novelists'. Now, if you will but agree with me, I will withdraw this qualification gladly. Of course, I don't mean to say, as Socrates would, that you would be a better novelist if you knew what you were talking about, but only that in that case you would have Socratic knowledge as well as artistic skill. And throughout, as you have noticed, I have been but a humble inquirer. Come, what do you think of my solution?"

At this point a silence ensued and no answer came from either of my opponents, who seemed to have extended themselves at great ease in their mighty armchairs and were apparently meditating on what I had said with extraordinary attention.

"I have silenced them at last," I whispered, but as I left the house a sense of something equivocal or ironical in the whole turn of this discussion persisted in my mind ineradicably and it was this which saddened my victory.

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BELLOC AS BIOGRAPHER

THREE SPLENDORS AND A SAINT

by Sister M. Madeleva

VERSATILITY such as Hilaire Belloc possesses only the gods can give. Essays he writes, novels, histories, verse. His very recent *Belinda* is a whimsy of his mind; *The Path to Rome* an unforgettable mood of his heart. As such it is his rarest book. Here, once and not again, he ventured upon the borders of a partial autobiography. His biographies are many and brilliant. They are all the works of a poised and careful intellect. They represent completely excellent, but not extreme, examples of the two types that we have lived to see, those before and those after the publication of Strachey's *Queen Victoria.* They may be called the old and the new biography, unless one feels with James Truslow Adams that "if there is any word which more than another is coming to send a shiver down the susceptible spine of a man who has an historic background, it is the word 'new', so sweated in literary shops". The debunking of heroes, the whitewashing of saints, the Freudian complex, the chronological sequence, the murderous inclusion and exclusion of details are extremes in alternatives from which he has chosen his method. One cannot say that his method has not changed in the changing presences of these new Lives, but only as his shoes or his ties have adjusted themselves to varying modes. The suit of his mind is established and prevails. In 1930 as in 1899 it is impersonal, aloof, military, logical, brilliant. It sheds encumbering historic details; it abandons a youthful device of repetition and another of ironic foreshadowing; it adopts modifications of pattern. But it is nevertheless the intellectual vesture of the Honors History student of Oxford, the mental uniform of the driver of the 8th Regiment of French Artillery at Toul, Meurthe-et-Moselle.

Belloc has published seven full-length biographies; the first in 1899, the latest in 1930. They are in order of publication: *Danton, Robespierre, Marie Antoinette, James II, Joan of Arc, Richelieu, Wolsey*; the originals are Catholics all and as Catholics the worst and the best in the world. Because they illustrate every type of fidelity or infidelity possible to the ethics of Catholic life, Belloc's selection of them is the more surprising, and his treatment of them is likewise the more surprising. His choice is a piece of the fine militancy of the man. He sees no greater need to apologize for Richelieu than for Richard III. One is an unworthy Catholic; one is an unworthy king. That the very magnitude of their achievement depends upon their spiritual or royal failure is not his concern. This achievement, wholly secular, unreligious, irreligious, political, constitutes the entire essence of the Belloc biography. His characters he describes by their acts; their acts he chronicles as dominating, determining, influencing the political or economic scheme that is their country or their period.

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He never evaluates them in terms of right and wrong, of fidelity or infidelity. He never intimates a judgment on their conditions of soul; he regards them only as figures of the State. Their acts are significant only as possible causes for political or social effects, not as results of moral struggle. This very absence of Catholic consciousness, of emotional sensitivity gives to his biographies their most unusual values. Let it not be concluded that his method is an ignoring of his faith; it is the suspending of all its judgments while possessing all its dogmas.

Catholic biography begins, perhaps, with St. Athanasius's *Life of St. Anthony*. It includes Asser's *Alfred, Guthlac,* Roper's *Life of Syr Thomas More,* the *Fioretti,* the *Vita Nuova,* Francis Thompson's *Life of St. Ignatius*. The dehumanized, romanticized, credulous saint's life is the disease of its hagiography and stands in relation to it as the *Elsie Dinsmore* books to fiction. Its fundamental note, its resurgent note is truth, unapologetic, unafraid. St. Ambrose articulated, Pope Leo XIII repeated it in his advice to historians, "Tell the truth. God has no need of a lie". In his unterrified choice of characters, in his uncompromising exposition of them, Belloc is the eminent exponent of this resurgent note. His peculiar service is to the non-Catholic reader. He has the invaluable norm of experimental knowledge by which to evaluate his men and women; they lived, for better or for worse, by the moral code that binds him. The non-Catholic, however exhaustively fortified with historic accuracy, can make only a vicarious guess at their infused spiritual responsibilities. And it is upon their relation to these responsibilities that the validity of their lives rests. Because, being mindful of whatever spiritual discrepancies, he can look steadily at his characters on the levels of national, economic, social consequence, Belloc is at once the most impartial and impersonal of biographers. His evaluations he records with metallic indifference, with clinical aloofness, with military precision, with logical finality. His record is uniformly brilliant and convincing.

Four cases of his finished report are here considered: *Marie Antoinette*, published in 1910, *Richelieu* and *Joan of Arc* in 1929, *Wolsey* in 1930; three splendors and a saint. Not because the Maid differs from these in life, but because he regards her differently in biography do we consider her apart and first. *Joan of Arc* is a brochure in devotional, unexpanded style, possessing none of the marks of indifference and detail that characterize the Belloc biographies. It is the brief life of a saint; a most excellent example. There are not about it any of the familiar methods of the long works save only these instances of the two-word sentence: "Time pressed", "She slept". The language is that of the loveliest hagiography; the theme luminous; untroubled faith in her Voices, her Friends, the Lovely Ones, those High Saints of Heaven whom Joan knew to be wiser than men. It is a sketch merely, a soldier's word of a soldier, a saint's story minus historic impedimenta, Belloc's *Joan of Arc* is never Mark Twain's elate, uplifted miracle; she is, indeed, a white arrow divinely feathered and shot straight to the difficult heart of victory; a human arrow, however, for all her heavenly shining, to be broken, not in flight, but in the brutal blundering that followed. Of that bitter business Belloc says; "Never was she to be at peace in Christian earth beside the Blessed Dead, but more brightly, through fire, to strike to Paradise". The book is the disconcerting protest of faith implicit and simple as Jeanne d'Arc herself against the brawn and bluster of Shaw's *Saint Joan.*

Marie Antoinette, Richelieu, Wolsey are all of a class. Their very differences are divergences or variations in qualities that they possess in common. *Marie Antoinette* is twice as long as *Wolsey*, and somewhat more than half as fine. In order of relative merit they range: *Richelieu*, good; *Marie Antoinette*, better; *Wolsey*, best. This, of course, on a

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high level of more than ordinary general excellence. They are a trinity of human pomp and intrigue and domination, begetting their inevitable human futilities, their conscious mortal falls. The method used in the upbuilding of the records differs for each. *Marie Antoinette* is the chronological biography. Chapter follows chapter in simple time sequence. It is the best of Belloc's biography of the conventional type. *Richelieu* is a strategic work, a collection of military communiqués, reporting achievement under the captions, "Nature", "Process", "Exit". The method is technical, of the science of arms, a series of communications, general orders, recapitulations. Belloc sees the blaze of the English cardinal dramatically. *Wolsey* he writes according to dramatic technique, if not in dramatic form. Under "The Setting of the Tragedy" he presents: "The Stage", "The Programme", "The Plot", "The Cast". "The Action" falls into the conventional five acts of every Elizabethan tragedy. It is the most interesting of the three methods; it results in the best of the three books.

Through his diverse methods, the Belloc qualities prevail: impersonal brilliance, aloofness, precision, finality, never the novelist's warmth, never the artist's glow, always sensible repression in the presence of abundant detail. One may find in the three books two open admirations and three aversions. Fersen, the quiet-eyed Swede, comes almost as close to the heart of Belloc as to the love of Marie Antoinette, as he walks, like an occasional shadow through the book, unobtrusive, unconcealed, unafraid. The fineness of his tacit consecration to the Queen became "a living communion between them. The whole sequence is that of a devotion in a tale or a song, and yet burning in living being, . . . whether comprehensible or not, as rare as epic genius".

Not since Shakespeare's dedication of *Henry the Eighth* to the memory of one good woman has Catherine of Aragon had such an apologist as Belloc. The old, old picture of glum and soured austerity, of dim and blighted Castilian dignity, is obliterated each time the competent, rejected, but valiant Catherine enters the scene.

"She had great manners, of course," he says, "for she came from the very heart of what was most dignified in Europe, the houses of Aragon and Castile. . . . She had the fixed will of the placid, and, in the three or four matters upon which her life turned, an iron sense of right."

The corollary of Belloc's admiration for Catherine is his contempt for Anne Boleyn. His scorn is complete:

"Bald above the eyes, lacking in brows," he describes her, "and with a stupid but very obstinate mouth, flat chested, with a long thin neck, not too upright in carriage, she has not left a word of wit or warmth or personality whereby she may be remembered. What a wretched lanky pin on which to hang the destiny of the Christian world! . . . the beginning of her double chin was the most healthy thing about her."

This is as nearly personal, uncomplimentary, Stracheyan, as Belloc becomes. And there are his two lesser aversions, the Emperor Joseph of Austria and Marie de Medici.

"The man," he says, "was of the kind to whom Marcus Aurelius provides a model. His certitudes were in words or negations; his judgments vapid, determined, superficial and false—in a manner Prussian without the Prussian minuteness. In a manner French, but with none of the French clear depth and breadth." The Medici was "a big, heavy, dull woman, enjoying none of those political virtues (such as inflexibility of purpose and horse-sense in negotiations) commonly attached to heaviness and dulness".

In this far does Belloc give himself to the color as to the form of life; herein he both anticipates and fulfils Strachey.

Belloc prints, if he has them, few hates and fewer loves. But he has a gallery of the

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most gallant miniatures. One could read his biographies for the brilliance of these alone. They are most entertaining, most invaluable. They display those minor and inconspicuous persons who are invariably lost in the impact of the lordly ones and lay bare the disconcerting finds. Beside the life-size study of the immature, untrained daughter, Marie Antoinette, stands the effective portrait of the quietly determined and never incompetent mother, Maria Theresa. There also stands the king of sixty, Louis XV, with "his rare and completed gestures, . . . his capacity for continued dignity", the one person to whom the vivacious and ungoverned Dauphine "paid a strongly affectionate respect". Beside them is the Grand Almoner, the Cardinal de Rohan, fixed with the keen brevity of the third book of kings: "He lived, unnoticed and unremembered remote in Strasburg . . . refused the civil oath, survived the Queen by some ten years, and died, doing after that no more evil".

But the beauty of his brief biography is in the Tudor collection. Catherine and Anne have had their bit of display. The sketch of Henry preceded them, "the big lad", "the young fellow", "the new boy King", "the hesitating Tudor". There are in the gallery miniatures of Thomas Howard, Charles Brandon, Leo X, Adrian VI, who had for epitaph the single graven word of mute regret, *"Utinam"*, "Would that!", Clement VII who "lost England—failed to appease the German quarrel—suffered the dreadful sack of Rome, achieved nothing". There is Francis I, who, of the three Kings "who stood up like a trinity of youth before Europe in the five years, 1515-20 . . . had the effect of a symbol, . . . the incarnation of the people in one man"; there is Charles V, the Hapsburg who "inherited madness plentifully on both sides"; Laurence Campeggio, "that kind of man to whom all men listen with respect and whom—since the fall of man—nobody follows"; and finally Thomas Cromwell, the supplanter, who contrary to the rule of such men died "by the axe and whining for life". These perfect incidental miniatures are the beauty of the Belloc biography.

If "the best test of a man's intelligence is his capacity for making a summary" Hilaire Belloc is of the elect. The periods during which his chosen ones lived are the most crowded, the most intense, the most terrifying in European history. The necessity for selection is acute. Summary is imperative. And as exercises in summary these biographies are performances in sheer brilliance of intellect. They set the stage for an international marriage, an ecclesiastical preferment, an American revolution. They clear the air, demolish delusion, establish sanity and fearless and fearful truth. Out of multiplied incisive examples let one out of *Marie Antoinette* stand for all:

> It is in the routine of our universities to say that Catholicism was struck to death by two great unheavals; the Reformation opened it to attack; the Revolution dealt the mortal blow. It is now said to be dying, and especially in France. This is the first truth; that our universities say these things; some regret, some are pleased; but it is believed and said in either camp.
>
> Next, it is true that Louis XVI practised his religion and believed in it. Next, it is true that his Queen, never wholly abandoning the rule of religion—far from it—was now, in 1787, particularly devoted and increasingly exact in her observance; daily, as she daily suffered, more penetrated inwardly by the spirit of the Church. A fourth truth is that no single man pretending to high intelligence in that generation of Frenchmen believed in more than a God: the only quarrel was between those who believed in such a Being and those who denied this last of dogmas. The fifth truth is, that but yesterday all the French hierarchy and all the 80,000 priests of the Church—save, perhaps, three—suffered the loss of all corporate property and all established income rather than vary in one detail from the discipline of Rome. The sixth truth is that the prominent and outstanding names of the French hierarchy or of the Church's defenders before and during this revo-

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lutionary crisis were: Rohan, an evil liver, a cheat, a fool, and a blackguard; Talleyrand something even lower in morals than he was higher in wit; the Archbishop of Narbonne—living six hundred miles from his See with his own niece for mistress; Gregoire, a full schismatic and in his way an honest man; Maury, a vulgar politician, like one of our own vulgar politicians to-day, a priest out for a fortune, a sort of "Member of Parliament", a petty persecutor of the Pope in person and of the Papacy, in time a Cardinal—and this man Lomenie. The seventh truth is that Marie Antoinette (who practised her religion) ardently supported Lomenie and befriended him, and that, therefore, Louis (who was devout) accepted him for Chief Minister.

Read these undoubted truths together and decide whether the Faith has advanced or receded in a hundred years.

Here is the military disposition of material, the expedition of a soldier. Here is the wide and accurate knowledge of the student. Here is the nice appraisal, the quick, unerring grasp of the essential that is the test of intellect.

After the method of summary, Belloc's most remarkable characteristic is the short, even the two-word sentence. His brief, blunt clause, "I mean", which he interjects a score of times through the *Marie Antoinette* he drops entirely in *Wolsey*. His two- and three-word sentences he retains. In fact, the fortunes of the luckless cardinal can be reconstructed from them as they occur in the text: "He failed". "He did not". "All is changing". "He settled the peace". "He would err". "Anne suspects him". "He deceives himself". "It was imprudent". "Wolsey capitulated". The device is difficult; the effect is persuasive.

The habit of augury and prophetic doom which first alarms, then depresses, then annoys the reader in the earlier biographies Belloc abandons entirely in *Wolsey*. No person, not even an international pawn, acts with a consciousness of achieved consequence and ironies. It is not quite accurate to present one, somewhat anachronistically, against such backgrounds. So, after presenting the Austrian princess as the protagonist in a Greek tragedy, he drops the device. His habit of dating transitions, of predicating the absolute, modifies as his craft perfects itself.

The stamp of competence is upon all this body of biography. But the mark of chiefest difference between *Wolsey* and the earlier volumes is the mark of beauty. Here, at last, one comes upon a style that is not military in its precision, that is not too busy with the making or the breaking of a life or of a kingdom to pause for a delicate moment upon the humanity involved. It is hard to isolate instances of this terse beauty, the essence of which inheres in its context. Let two examples serve as best, in their truncated form, they may.

> Anne suspects him. She makes the King suspect him. She crowbars and levers him out of his real power while all the façade of that power remains intact.

And again:

> Wolsey did not put on these things for the purpose of strengthening himself, of ruling more thoroughly; he put them on for the sheer love of splendour. All those shouting liveries and heaps of sculptured gold, great houses, arrased rooms, were an end in themselves. And this procession of the Hat, this apotheosis of what a clothier made, was all one with the rest.

Indeed, one should quote entire that absolute, mock-heroic passage on the progress of the Hat, the Crimson Hat with Tassels, the Cardinal's Hat, that concrete crimson glory which so dizzied the pompous son of the English grazier. Rather I choose Belloc in his one rare moment of compassion, in the lone paragraph of Wolsey's going off to Esher:

> But before he went away he had all his store of wealth in the great house set out in order, that the King's officers might take it by Royal order, and in the October morning light the mass of gold and the gilt and the silver and the stuff of all kinds, the hangings and

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the precious stones stood reflected on the dark tables of his rooms. Then he set out to go up the river in his own barge, and from his own steps, for the tide served.

This, by all that is English, is a high moment in the making of biography.

When criticism and analysis have ended, there remain in question the central characters themselves. What has biography done for them? Marie Antoinette might well have been cradled on a golden guillotine, so ominously does the ironic menace of inevitable doom anticipate her very birth. A puppet of a national Nemesis when most a despot of monarchy, she moves by a series of tactless and headstrong mistakes from ignorant girlhood, through restless youth, ambitious and gratified motherhood, to imprisonment and death. Two convictions emerge from the familiar facts: Marie Antoinette never understood the French temper; the French, almost from the first, hated Marie Antoinette. One accepts these statements on the basis of repetition and instant proof. As Belloc presents them they are too evident for doubt, too remote for pity. Richelieu moves with the detachment of complete selfishness. There is no simple human relation about him. He is a phenomenon of precocious ecclesiastical and military power and pomp and greed, the one man who both founded Nationalism in France and made permanent the divisions between the Catholic and the Protestant culture. If he is to be praised for producing the self-worship called patriotism, the reader does not praise him. He watches him with an intellectual aversion too cold even for hatred. Wolsey, for all his near-sighted foreign policies, his domination of the state, his vain parade of pomp, is a broken old man whom one pities slightly at the last. They go to death, all three, with an unobtrusiveness that is the final perfection of biographic art.

The non-Catholic reader of these chronicles will find them colorless in religious emphasis, correct in religious idiom. The belief that Christian unity is the economic hope of Europe is a conviction with Belloc, as is the superiority of the Latin over the Anglo-Saxon or Nordic culture. Whatever has severed or sacrificed these is categorically evil. A discussion of his position is beside the point here. He is peculiarly competent as a political and social scientist to maintain it; he is peculiarly prepared by inheritance and experience to appraise the characters and conditions he has chosen.

What may be the perfect business of biography I cannot say. But at times I meet a book in which I feel that that business has been accomplished. For me it is achieved in *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* and in Francis Thompson's *Life of St. Ignatius*. They have not the historical fulness that the subjects could easily supply, nor the social panoramas in which the two soldiers of Christ are intrinsic. But they do communicate a sense of the unique lives of the originals, and beget a love for them. This is the point that one misses in Belloc, life as the individual was conscious of it. The little Austrian girl was surely sometimes in her own consciousness a child simply, the hated queen a mother putting her children to bed. Richelieu must have been, in moments of miserable headache or when taking his Saturday night bath, only Armand Jean du Plessis. Thomas Wolsey, the lad of Ipswich, could not have been metamorphosed into a chronic crimson parade. Some time they must have merely lived; they could not have maintained a lifelong pageant for the cause of phenomenal biography.

Perhaps what one really misses is their souls. Athanasius would have denounced and Dante would have damned them. The chronicle of a Francis Thompson would have pitied. Belloc does not advert to them. His device is a delicate one. His omission may have a hundred implications. In the presence of the devastating exposures of modern biography, who shall say that for the souls of Marie Antoinette and Richelieu and Wolsey silence may not be best?

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A PORTFOLIO

CO-AUTHORSHIP

by Gertrude Mathews Shelby and Samuel Gaillard Stoney

"How do you do it?"

That question bombards the members of a literary team as if there were something impossibly occult about such a partnership, or as if it could not exist for the same causes that form such combinations in more prosaic businesses, where common interest in a common field, intersupporting powers, and combined capital of material, ability and experience are considered quite sufficient reasons.

When these views are advanced, too often the questioner leaves unconvinced, still enchained by the idea of the mystery of "God-given inspiration", which, in popular conception, seems to come only in solitude, fasting and prayer—preferably at some witching hour, but anyhow, in solitude.

While creative ideas happily do so come part of the time, we believe that the rest of the time they are born of talk. (If you don't like talk, you probably can't collaborate.) Consistent talkers know how inspiring talk may be; how their most aspiring ideas, their most illuminating hunches, their most successful *mots* spring instantaneously in the full heat and flow, the give and take, of conversation.

Both of the books which we published last year are to no small extent the products of the stimulus of conversation. *Black Genesis*, with its Negro account of Creation, came from and grew through the spoken word. Beginning mainly with folklore material largely in possession of one of us, and a scheme largely the work of another of us, the problem in that book lay in building eleven short stories in which the same characters occurred. As every creative work grows, so did this, abetted always by the patron saint of talk.

Likewise the novel *Po' Buckra*, which began life under the title of "Brass Ankle", had its inception in conversation. (A strange thing happened about that title. The dummy of our book had been made up and given to salesmen, when a play by Du Bose Heyward with the same name was announced, for fall publication. After consultation, we adopted a new one. Some time later we discovered that no less than three other writers had hit upon "Brass Ankle" as a title and that two of their schemes were well advanced.) One of us, years before, had used this arresting phrase of the South Carolina country. The other brought it forward as a title, a race-theme for a novel, which should have as a leading character a man of the peculiar mixture of white, Indian and Negro bloods which this word implies. The chief conflict evolved into the marriage of this brass-ankle to a white woman. One of us suggested a story which laid this conflict against a problem of the countryside and added a striking climax. Ideas flying from mind to rebutting mind, the *dramatis personae* enlarged, incidents and background formed. From notes made by each of us as we went, it was possible for one of us to build a full outline, or first draft.

This free scheme of work hit upon, one advantage of partnership was palpable. In the first exploring for material it was only too easy to note that four eyes see much more

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than twice as much as two, particularly when the team is mixed. The stereoscopic advantage of two witnesses has the added qualifications of two sexes to give, besides perspective and dimensions, a compound point of view very valuable to the observer if sometimes a little devastating for the observed. And as for talk—not even the worst of Low Country roads could stop it; so the book went on bouncing itself out in conversation where writing of any sort would have been impossible.

Collaboration—a loose term which covers various degrees of the work of two people on a common job of authorship—is one thing. Co-authorship is another—full partnership. Both writers in the team invent, construct, develop character, evolve incidents, contrive episodes, interpret emotion, and determine treatment.

Doing all this is very much like taking part in a literary form of tennis. Idea-balls are batted back and forth, one mind sparking the other. In setting up a line of action, devising the best use of material, and developing a consistent philosophy for characters, one will be better at this, the other at that, but the chief point is that the ball shall be kept busy, and the chief virtue that its motion keeps both parties on their toes, and the story vivid. When enough is scored to compound the tentative story, the first game is over.

Successive games take this draft through several stages of development. Writing is done separately, versions are swapped and discussed. Each novel presents its own especial problems; probably no two grow precisely the same way. But in the method which provided effective growth for *Po' Buckra* these were virtually four stages or games. The second was that of expanding, developing characters, ripening plots, and building up incidents and background, analyzing what was required to interpret what was depicted. As it formed the story became compelling, and, even when not satisfied with parts of it, we forged on. Besides that compulsion we had the advantage of judgments commonly arrived at, the spur of encouragement, the check and guidance of counter-feeling.

In this set of literary tennis we played, the third game was to produce a logical and cumulative sequence of episodes, to handle minor conflicts, to arrange the parts in a pattern which provided a flowing and interesting line, with dramatic progression and not without suspense. Final construction was effected; emotion was tempered or heightened; interpretations were improved; proportions, where they seemed faulty, were altered.

The last game was one of treatment, of general craftsmanship, of putting in final touches and unifying style. To most the necessity of this unification we had discussed words and rhythm from the start. Every sentence was gone over by each of us numerous times, and read aloud. In the end very little stood as first written down, but was rather a common denominator of taste, ideas, and skill. It would be difficult today to put a finger on a passage and say that such was one's work and such the other's.

Perils, toils, and pains naturally attend any book, and any partnership.

Difficulties? Of course. The reason why there are not more full-fledged literary partnerships is probably fear of rubs and friction. It's justified in most cases. Few people are sufficiently convinced of common effectiveness, or really want that effectiveness enough to take all the trouble involved in subjugating ego and adjusting opinions for a merely hoped-for end-result. For literary work is speculative. It is often the case that only the strongest kind of belief in the specific job justifies the expenditure of energy and time required to produce a novel, for the chances of success are always questionable.

But if two right-minded, well-equipped and sympathetic people believe there is some-

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thing worth while to be built by common effort, and agree that the thing they each want is effectiveness, difficulties which arise can be smoothed out. If they are sufficiently analytical to understand how far their several main abilities support each other, and sufficiently versatile so that (as in this case) no function of the game is performed wholly by one person, there is sufficient incentive to carry the team through. Sporadic irritations may arise. Writing a book is a long task. One has to bear with partners, and encourage them, else the essential enthusiasm for the work itself would dim.

When difficulties do arise, any person with a healthy philosophy must take somewhat the attitude suggested by the Negro preacher: "De trouble wid you is dat you don't go often enough an' sit on de front piazza o' yo' better self, an' find out what's goin' on!" Usually no more than that is necessary, if the play is the thing.

That difficulties were more than offset by advantages in the case of this particular co-authorship is perhaps best evidenced by the fact that although it might have been expected that production would be slowed up by having to consider two people's attitudes, tastes, and intentions, these two books of ours published in 1930 were, we believe, done in less time than it would have taken either of us to have written either of them alone. If the pudding is good, that proof ought to be enough.

In a "we" job, one writer may contribute more local material, the other more general; one may know more of construction and what is required, while each has certain invaluable qualities of his or her own. Equipments differ; the point is to make the best of all capacities. In this partnership the abilities of both of us were called upon for all sorts of work. We tried to use the common-sense of any business office about the executive and financial arrangements; the person who had most training assumed that, but was pledged to carry out a commonly-agreed-upon policy. With a sense of equality and fair play, with devotion to work taken seriously, it is astonishing to find that the common task stimulates both to new uses of imaginative capacity. It would seem that in a well-balanced team certain principles of mental activity, or psychological interaction, operate which are commonly undervalued.

"ONE DOESN'T SELL A PICTURE OF HEINE"

by George Seibel

Not far from Berlin is the city of Potsdam, famous for its memories of Frederick the Great at Sans Souci, and not far from Potsdam is the little village of Bornim, not famous for anything in particular; unless it be a portrait of Heinrich Heine—the best of the three portraits for which the poet sat as model. Most pictures of Heine, like most of Schiller, are idealizations by romantic artists who never saw their subject.

Eduard Engel, owner of the picture at Bornim, is a picturesque literary figure. He has known more authors and men of action than any other man in Germany. As a stenographer of the first Reichstag in 1872, he met Bismarck and Moltke at close range. As editor of a widely read magazine he became acquainted with scores of literary folk, from Paul Heyse to Hermann Sudermann. Not only Germans, but French writers like Zola and Daudet, received him in their homes. He knew a Greek pirate who had strangled several hundred Turks with his bare hands and casually remarked, "They were only Turks". He hunted up the foster brother of Kaspar Hauser, and established quite definitely that the mystery-boy was a fraud. He tramped over the island of Ithaca and proved it was the real home of Homer's Odysseus, although the learned Dr. Dörpfeld had insisted it wasn't. He was the first

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proponent of "Sommerzeit", which we call "daylight saving", and he has written very good histories of three literatures—German, English and French. Today, five years older than Bernard Shaw, he is living at Bornim-bei-Potsdam, cultivating roses and memories.

One of his most precious memories is of that portrait of Heinrich Heine which he once refused to sell to an Empress.

The portrait was painted by Gottlieb Gassen, who lived in Munich at the time Heine was there as guest in Count Rechberg's palace. Gassen first made a pencil sketch of Heine, who liked the sketch and offered to sit for a portrait in oils. There was some disagreement before the work was completed, and Gassen put it aside. It finally reached the hands of Adolf Strodtmann, one of Heine's editors and his first biographer, and Engel bought it from Strodtmann's widow for a comparative bagatelle before Heine collectors had begun to bid up prices of Heine souvenirs. The picture had been in Engel's possession for some years when he heard of another Heine treasure for sale.

Since Heine had been carried from his "mattress grave" to Montmartre, in 1856, it was vaguely known that the poet had written his *Memoirs*, and it was uneasily surmised that a good many parts of malice had been mixed with his ink. The legend that Heine had left instructions that the *Memoirs* should not be published until he had been dead fifty years increased the apprehension of those who had reason to fear his barbed pen. In fact, Mathilde, the poet's widow, received 2400 francs annuity from her brother-in-law Karl, partly in consideration of the book's remaining under lock and key.

Heine used to delight in tormenting those who were in awe of his iron box. "Enough poison to finish all my enemies," he would say, pointing to the Exterminator. Eduard Engel, moving in the literary circles of Paris two decades later, learned that the *Memoirs* really existed—some people had doubted it—and with the instinct of a modern journalist he secured a promise that he should be informed if the family of Mathilde were ever willing to sell the manuscript.

This was the word Engel received in 1883. The family needed money and was willing to sell the poet's revelations.

Engel knew he could not command the sum that would probably be required. But recently the *Gartenlaube*, which lay beside the Bible in nearly every German home, had passed into the hands of new owners who wished to prove their enterprise by securing a sensational feature.

"I can get Heine's *Memoirs* for you," Eduard Engel informed the publishers.

The Brothers Kröner were delighted, and Engel started for Paris with a tentative offer of 16,000 marks, a vast sum in that day of small things.

A French attorney had the manuscript and conducted the negotiations. He expected to get at least 25,000 francs without letting the purchaser read the *Memoirs*.

"Adieu, monsieur," was Engel's rejoinder.

Finally Engel was permitted to read the manuscript, which he did with poker face in one long sitting, not uttering a single word for four hours while the attorney sat and watched him.

The *Memoirs* were a disappointment. Instead of paprika and poison, here were pressed flowers of romance—kisses printed upon the hand of the hangman's daughter and religious ecstasies obviously simulated. Revelations and scandal there were none. The Big Bertha proved a popgun. Still anything from the pen of Heinrich Heine would find tens of thousands of hungry readers. Engel conducted his negotiations with the shirt-sleeve candor attributed to the youthful U. S. Grant in a horse-trade.

"I have been authorized to pay as high as 16,000 marks for the *Memoirs*," he said. "Having read them, I know they are not worth that much. But my clients are willing to pay it, so I make the offer, *à prendre ou à laisser*."

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Engel finally got the manuscript for 16,000 marks and carried it off to Stuttgart, to the publishers. It appeared in the *Gartenlaube*, during 1884, and was devoured by all the romantic devotees of the *Buch der Lieder*. For the number containing the opening instalment, Engel permitted the editor to publish a steel engraving reproducing the Gassen portrait of Heine. Here enters the Empress.

Three days after the publication Engel received a letter from Elisabeth of Austria.

Elisabeth's worship of Heine is one of the romantic episodes of the dark Hapsburg tragedy. The monument by Ernst Herter, which finally found a haven in the Bronx, not far from the Poe cottage, was first commissioned by her in 1888. She bought the Hasselriis statue for her Achilleion palace on Corfu; she authorized the same sculptor to erect the beautiful monument which now marks the grave in Montmartre cemetery.

The letter Engel got from the Imperial Votaress was direct and plain: "You are the owner of a Heine portrait which I wish to buy from you. Name the price and it will be paid".

Engel told me the story in his library at Bornim, where the Heine portrait still hangs upon the wall. The wishes of Empresses are usually regarded as commands. The Engel exchequer was not plethoric. There was the easy possibility of naming a price that would purchase a handsome home in Steglitz, then a pleasant residence quarter of Berlin. Engel talked all these considerations over with his wife. Then he answered the letter of the Empress.

"*Ein Bild von Heinrich Heine verkauft man nicht,*" he wrote. "One does not sell a picture of Heinrich Heine."

The Imperial lady understood.

"I appreciate your sentiments," she wrote again some days later. "No true lover of Heine would sell anything pertaining to the poet. But there is one favor you might grant me, for I am also a lover of Heine. May I borrow your picture long enough to have a copy made? It shall be unharmed and will be restored in a short time."

To this request only one reply was possible. And in a few days a carriage drove up to the Engel home to take away the picture. It was returned in about four weeks and replaced on the wall of Engel's room.

A letter of thanks from the Empress told Herr Engel that the copy had turned out well, and hung on the wall of her study, where she could see it every day. And in a plush casket, accompanying the letter, lay a costly opal and diamond brooch for Frau Engel, from the Empress who could not buy the portrait of Heinrich Heine.

"If I had sold the picture," Professor Engel told me, "it would have come back to me. After the Empress was assassinated by an Italian anarchist, Franz Josef returned to the original owners all the Heine mementoes she had acquired. Yet I never did regret my decision not to sell the picture. *Ein Bild von Heinrich Heine verkauft man nicht!*"

A SONNET AGAINST SIMILE

by David Morton

It was as though I passed to other lands,
Sown with sharp stars, as daisies are sown here,
And trees were priests with lean, uplifted hands,
That froze my blood and stopped my breath with fear;
And brooks were spun of silver in that place,
And, there, the moon a lantern was, indeed,
That grinned and wagged and wore a foolish face—
And I was starving, there, of an old need.

Since when, I speak no more of star-like flowers,
Nor lantern-moons, nor trees that shelter me,
As terrible priests ordained with terrible powers,—
But hold the star and daisy, moon and tree
More intimate, more dear in their own name,
Than any other fashioned for their fame.

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OR SHALL WE GO ANGLIC?

by Janet Rankin Aiken

I HAVE BEEN enjoying more aftermath from the now somewhat elderly article "English Over the World," published in last September's BOOKMAN and reprinted in the December *Readers' Digest*. This time it took the form of at the worst an avalanche, or at the best a windfall, of material from the Simplified Spelling Board.

Now the Simplified Spelling Board has nothing to do with the question whether English, *qua* English, should or should not sweep the world as I have urged it to do. The Board may take an interest in whether the sweep can occur or not, but that is by the by. The central contention of the Simplified Spelling Board is that it is a crime against humanity, not only against foreigners learning our speech but against even the little tots now carrying first readers to American schools, to foist upon them our present English spelling.

To a great extent we all side with the Simplified Spelling Board. We don't have to be statisticians to figure that a school year might be cut from the lives of every one of our children—a staggering saving of some forty million school years for the children of this generation—if spelling could be eliminated from the curriculum. If English could actually be spelled as spoken and written as spelled, then untold hours and buckets of tears might be saved annually.

Personally I am what is perversely called a natural speller, a term which means that I naturally spell unnaturally. So it is not my own tears to which I refer, but to those of the unnatural spellers, properly to be called natural, whose misspellings I correct daily. Much as I realize that these victims should call my bluff when I attempt to insert the central *r* into their natural and beautiful "resevoir", still I am paid to insert that *r*, and insert it I must.

But I am drifting away from the Simplified Spelling Board, which has just sent me several pamphlets, one hailing from St. Paul and named *World English*, and several called Anglic and originating, according to the text, in Sweden, which is not so different from St. Paul, in the long run.

I do not altogether grasp the *World English* pamphlet. It appears to be simply a proposal in general to bell the cat of English spelling without any specific cat-belling devices. One sentence I cannot forbear quoting: "The English language is so largely the common property of mankind that it would seem only necessary to simplify it somewhat to enable the entire world to adopt it as a secondary language".

Now there is a lot wrong with that sentence. If English is so largely the common property, why is it necessary to simplify it? And does the world need enablement to adopt English? Will any vote-catching device such as an altered spelling really lead to the election of our tongue above all others? Were it not better to urge the simplification of our

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spelling upon nobler grounds, such as the elimination of the buckets of tears already referred to?

Let us pass by World English as not sufficiently definite to chew on, and see what Anglic may be. The story as given in the pamphlets is a tiny bit obscure. If in unravelling it I do any injustice to any of the scholars involved, I can but hope I may be forgiven.

It seems from these pamphlets that English has still some hurdles to leap in its progress toward world use. One of these hurdles is the opposition of anti-English nations like Ireland and India, and another hurdle is the unnaturalness of English spelling. Can these be brought to cancel each other out?

I think the Simplified Spelling Board is trying to say that they will do so—that better spelling will help mollify Ireland and India and render them more favorable to the adoption (or retention?) of English in their business correspondence.

Again this seems to me all wrong. I cannot believe that Gandhi would be one bit influenced by being permitted to write "yu" instead of "you," or "red" instead of "read." It does not seem to be in keeping with what yu hav red of his character.

A much better basis for World English, as I see it, is the friendly refusal of those whose mother tongue is English to learn other languages. This beautiful inertia would lead Gandhi, Cosgrave and the rest to learn our speech even if only to argue with. If you differ with a person enough, you will have an overpowering desire to make him understand how completely you differ with him, a desire which would easily carry a good differer such as Gandhi or Cosgrave to the length of learning an alien language.

But again I am digressing. It seems, then, that Professor R. E. Zachrisson of Upsala, Sweden, a linguist of note and a most accomplished scholar, set himself the task of formulating for English a new spelling system which he has named Anglic. In June, 1930, he met in London representatives of the Simplified Spelling Boards of England and America, all of whom endorsed Anglic heartily. An organ—*Anglic, a Munthly Eduekaeshonal Revue*—has been established, and if you want it or other Anglic material, all you must do is write the Anglic Asoesiaeshon (Prez. R. E. Zachrisson, Sekr. H. Kökeritz), Uppsala, Sweden.

Now let us give a little study to this Anglic spelling plan.

It has 27 consonant symbols, eight of them double ones—*th, dh, sh, ch, zh, ng, qu,* and *wh*. Of these the symbol *qu* is unnecessary, since we already have its component parts in *k* and *w*. In other words, "queen" might as well be spelled "kween" thus saving a symbol. The same reasoning applies to *ch,* which is more accurately *tsh*. I shall have something to say presently about *th* and *dh*.

In English there are in fact 24 consonant sounds which are clearly distinguishable from one another. The three extra in Anglic are *qu,* which might as well be *kw, ch* which more accurately should be *tsh,* and *x* which is always either *ks* as in "extra", or *gz* as in "exist". Anglic could dispense with these three consonant symbols *x, c,* and *q,* all of which it nevertheless retains.

Possibly this is done premeditatedly. Since Anglic is being groomed to supplement rather than to supplant English spelling, perhaps these inaccuracies are kept so as to help the student more easily to make the transition from Anglic to Englic, as I shall call our unregenerate spelling. But again I must ask, why not be radical? It will be no harder to change English to a good system than to one only sort of good. Why clutter up Anglic with the inaccuracies of Englic?

Besides its 27 consonants, Anglic contains 23 vowel symbols, or 50 symbols in all to represent the 40 speech sounds of English. I shall not bore you with details about the vowels. But I should very much like to know how the originator and the endorsers of Anglic can reconcile it with their linguistic

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consciences to represent the letter *a* in "sat" and in "about" by the same spelling symbol, while the *or* of "effort" has a different symbol from the *ur* of "turn". Is not the *a* of "sat" a different sound from the *a* of "about"? Do not "effort" and "turn" have the same vowel sound? Why then does Anglic use the same symbol for the first two, and different symbols for the two last? But as I shall probably never know these things, why inquire?

Now it is quite true that *th* in "this" and *th* in "thin" are different sounds, and Anglic rightly uses *dh* for the first and *th* for the second. But note this: Anglic contains some 40 wurdsienz (word-signs) which keep the traditional Englic spelling and are simply learned as units by the student. Of these no fewer than 12 include the sound *dh* (then, their, the, that, et cetera) with the spelling *th*. Now will not the spelling of twelve of the commonest English words with *th* and the sounding of them with *dh* lead to confusion in the student's mind? It would in mine, should I be put to learning Anglic.

The pamphlet describing Anglic emphasizes in black letters the fact that "no wurdz end in konsonent plus e!" That *no*, by the way, is a misspelling. It is not in the list of wurdsienz, and hence should be spelled in Anglic *noe*. But that is a detail. What the rule means is that Anglic really does not end words with consonant plus e; it simply puts the e back with the vowel, spelling "kaek" for Englic "cake", "noet" for Englic "note", and so on. A good instance of Anglic vowel combinations is in the word "asoesiaeshon".

A difficulty which the sponsors of Anglic meet with a simple denial is the dialect question. Anglic, say they, "duz not faevr iedhr the British or the Americun Standerd Pronunsiaeshon". (The last word there should be "pronunsiaeshun" to jibe with Americun, should it not?) The sentiment is very good if we could believe it. But in that very sentence comes the naughty word either. The pamphlet calls it iedhr, with the vowel of lie. How many Standerd Americuns use that pronunsiaeshon? As an Americun I must protest; I say eedhr.

There is another even worse pit into which the inventors of a compromise spelling must fall, that of the pun. The beautiful heterogeneity of Englic makes it so that almost every spelling you may use will have some meaning or other, and often that meaning will be different from the one which your phonetics import. Thus "shoe" in Anglic is Englic "show", "halo" is "hallow", and so on. And that being the case, surely it was a mistake to print Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in Anglic, since that act involved speaking of the "onerd ded" who gave on the battlefield the "last fool mezhr ov devoeshon".

No, all things considered, I cannot go Anglic. I know Englic is a joke, and for many poor children and grown-ups a very grim joke. But Anglic does not seem altogether serious eedhr. If I ever give up Englic, it will be for something really good, and the only such thing I know is the scientific alphabet of the International Phonetic Association, an alphabet which is aimed at one end only—not compromise nor vote-catching, but scientific accuracy. It has one symbol and only one, for each sound. It will not pun, and it is fairly easy to read.

There is a service which the Simplified Spelling Board is rendering to English-speaking humanity, and it is a great one. It is helping to break down the bars of our prejudice against misspelling. It is helping us to see the beauty, the humor, or the pathos, of really good misspelling.

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ELSIE SINGMASTER

by Dayton Kohler

PREVAILING fashions in fiction have meant little to a small, black-eyed woman who lives at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Elsie Singmaster has never condescended to the literary mode of the moment, and this is a guarantee of that artistic and personal integrity which infuses all of her work. From the very outset of her career she belonged to that small group of writers who find in a faithful portrayal of human nature the only sound and abiding literary values. Her art was not born full grown, but to compensate for those early difficulties in matters of material and form she possessed a certainty of aim that was proof against demands of circumstance and time. Thus she arrived quietly at her place in American letters; her books were written in decisive accents but without parade of publicity or dramatic gesture.

Elsie Singmaster has always been close to the spirit of realism in creative writing. There was little talk of the new realism, however, when her curt, restrained narratives began to appear in the magazines of 1905, for that first decade of the present century was the heyday of the sentimental novel and a rococo romance that postured stiffly before a painted backdrop of history. Beside the literature of the period Miss Singmaster's tales of Pennsylvania German life, like the Middle Border stories of Hamlin Garland and Sarah Orne Jewett's stories of Maine provincialism, reflect a bright modernity of vision and presentation. The appearance of *Main Street* in 1920 had for most of us the sharp shock of an explosion, but its reverberations echoed less loudly in the ears of this woman who had already published two realistic novels dealing with life in the American small town. Likewise, the suppression, in Boston, of the magazine containing an instalment of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* brought forth only a smile of tolerant amusement when she remembered that one of her own stories had once been rejected as too daring for the pages of that same periodical.

She has maintained an uncompromising attitude toward the beliefs she held when she began to write. There is a quality austerely Lutheran in her nature which has bred in her a lasting dislike for anything cheap or trivial. Fundamental principles regarding the home, the state and the Church have been stressed again and again in the speech and actions of her self-respecting, God-fearing men and intelligent, devoted women. Essentially, the realism of *Keller's Anna Ruth* is the realism of *Katy Gaumer*; the keen irony of *What Everybody Wanted* has its counterpart in many of her earlier short stories; the patriotism of her historical books for children follows those examples of duty and valor shown in her early collection of Civil War stories, *Gettysburg*. She has never been forced to exchange one set of ideas for another, and because she was always a realist she has escaped fruitless experiment with the modern novel in its various manifestations.

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It must be remembered that Elsie Singmaster's novels and short stories, even when she is writing social satire, as in *What Everybody Wanted*, have dealt with small-town life. If she has chosen to see loyalty and self-sacrifice and quiet heroism in commonplace lives, as well as greed and petty ambitions and warped mentalities, that is due to the integrity of her vision. At any rate, she presents a picture of life that is well rounded and satisfying. Her viewpoint differs, of course, from that of a Sinclair Lewis, but both are writing of repressed lives in scenes and circumstances necessarily difficult and restricted. Miss Singmaster's men and women are dwellers in a bleak Arcady in which the somber undertones of tragedy are never far removed from the lyric simplicity of the idyll.

My greatest pleasure in her work is the ability to recreate behind the imagistic quality of her prose the scenes, authentic and enduring, of a Pennsylvania boyhood. Fertile farm land, in that distinctively Pennsylvania German region which fills the southeastern corner of the state, stretches out toward the horizon on either side of the highway in red and brown rectangles of plowed fields and sloping green meadows. There bronze cattle grazed in the pastures and sweating gray horses pulled stubbornly at a heavy plow in early spring. There were houses of white frame and brick and weatherbeaten field stone, set in trim gardens; houses with dim, cool interiors and immense kitchens that seemed always to smell of baking bread and boiling currant jelly. Red barns—symbols of prosperity and pride of ownership—gleamed in the bright sunshine, their square bulks larger than the houses of their owners. Orchards of apple and plum trees where children played on the thick, wiry grass and bees sought the fallen fruit. This land was always best in midsummer, it seemed, when heat laid a dim haze on the low hills and men and women worked with peasant simplicity in the fields and great meals were cooked at midday for hungry harvest hands whose coarse blue shirts were damp with sweat. Then dust rose in swirling yellow clouds at the passing of every vehicle, and men and animals seemed to move in motions without sound. Market days in Lancaster and Lebanon, to which Mennonites and Dunkers came wearing their quaint black clothes, the men in long beards and stiff-crowned hats, their wives and daughters in tight bonnets that are a token of unworldly desires and pious humility. A land of prosperous farms, of strange, almost medieval superstition and belief in hex-doctors and powwow cures for all ills, of a sturdy, patriarchal race that remains, in spite of all modern progress, one of the few peasant types in America, thrifty, aloof, speaking in an idiom of its own, tenacious in its ways of life and slow to change. This is the land of her own Basil Everman and Ellen Levis, and in this land, also, Elsie Singmaster was born to a literary heritage as well as a strongly-defined racial tradition.

The Singmasters in America have always regarded the Lutheran Church as a part of their German heritage. One remote ancestor studied under Martin Luther and lived in the home of Melanchthon, and Miss Singmaster's great-great-great-grandfather was the first Lutheran minister ordained in this country. Today the name is also associated with the theological seminary at Gettysburg, of which her father was president for many years. In a ministerial household Elsie Singmaster first learned to apply to her daily life those simple but wholly adequate standards of living which she has made so unerringly her own: the music of Johann Bach, novels by Jane Austen and those older writers who are somewhat out of fashion today, a high regard for scholarship, a delight in hospitality, a garden in which she can plant and dig. In so many ways she resembles one of her own characters; even her physical appearance does much to bear out this impression. She is small and squarely built, her eyes are dark, her cheek bones broad and her jaw firm and

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resolute. Her features and manner combine to give one the impression of tireless energy. And she possesses that same sturdy uprightness and honesty and kindly humor that one admires in the men and women of her creation.

Elsie Singmaster was born in Schuylkill Haven, where her father was then preaching, at the end of the seventies, and she lived in that town on the edge of the coal region until she was four years old. After several removals the family finally settled in Allentown. Among her earliest recollections are vivid impressions of old German churches and chorales. When she speaks of this period of her life, one sees clearly how her literary work has been shaped by two active influences reaching back into her childhood—the wise and witty man who was her father and her early knowledge of life among Pennsylvania German characters. The Reverend John A. Singmaster provided for his children a background of dignity and charm almost Emersonian in its simplicity, and from him his daughter readily absorbed a love of books and nature. Summers were always spent in an old log house near the village which became the Millerstown of Miss Singmaster's shows. There an old mill race near the house showed moss-grown steps by which converts of a sect of Baptists, almost a century before, had descended to the water for immersion. This was her first acquaintance with the religious observances of those curious sects whose histories are closely linked with pioneer settlements in eastern Pennsylvania.

English was always spoken in the Singmaster home, Mrs. Singmaster being a Quaker of English stock, but from playmates and neighbors the children acquired a knowledge of that hybrid mixture of German and English which is still heard as the language of common speech among older residents of rural communities. Miss Singmaster recalls that she studied rhetoric under a teacher who really knew only one language, Pennsylvania German. If her formal education in those days was at best rudimentary, there were always books for a young girl to read on the shelves of her father's library.

She read in those days all the books she could conveniently find. Standard volumes of Scott, Dickens and Hawthorne came first, followed by the incredible romances of Rider Haggard and Jules Verne from her brothers' stock of books. Samples of Gibbon, Carlyle, religious treatises from her father's study, even a paper-bound copy of "The Duchess" and *Robert Elsmere*, salvaged from some forgotten railway journey, composed the reading material of an eager young girl who knew, even then, that she wanted some day to write books of her own.

First a student at Cornell, she went later to Radcliffe; from that institution she was graduated in 1907. In 1905 she sold her first short story and within a few years she became a regular contributor to *Scribner's, Century*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. More than two hundred of her short stories have appeared in various magazines since that time. Five years after her graduation she married Harold Lewars, a musician, and went to live in Harrisburg. In 1915 Mr. Lewars died and she returned to her father's house in Gettysburg. There she lives in a house close to the Lutheran Seminary, on a ridge overlooking a portion of the historic battlefield.

Next to those impressions of her early life in the vicinity of Allentown, Gettysburg has exercised the most important influence on her literary work, for it was her privilege to hear at first hand many stories of men and women who had lived through those three terrible days of July first, second and third, 1863. Some of these stories are no more than legends now, since their tellers are dead and buried, but legends that Miss Singmaster has preserved in a collection of short stories bearing the heroically suggestive title *Gettysburg*, and in a series of brief narratives for younger readers, *Emmeline, John Baring's House, Sewing Susie, A Boy at Gettysburg*, and

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others. When Elsie Singmaster knew the "boy" who had lived at the mill and aided fugitive slaves across the border, he was an old man of more than eighty years. From his lips, however, she heard the story of the underground railway and an account of his later experiences, as a grown man, in the Federal Army. Out of such legendary material, also, she has constructed that excellent short story, "Penance", told in the quiet reminiscence of a Confederate officer who unknowingly failed his cause in the turning tide of the three days' battle.

I met Elsie Singmaster at the end of my sophomore year at Gettysburg College. The dramatic club was conducting an original one-act play contest that spring; therefore it was important that she should be asked to act as one of the judges. When I telephoned a brusque voice at the other end of the wire assured me that the speaker would be delighted to serve in that capacity. There was, later, an invitation to dinner, and I saw her for the first time against the perfect background of her own house on Seminary Ridge. My first confused impressions were of an antique crystal lamp upon a table in the wide hallway, of a large room filled with books and old furniture, where a friendly, quiet-eyed woman dressed in soft green sat and touched with graceful courtesy upon those college topics that would put a youthful sophomore most quickly at his ease. Facing her across the dark, polished oval of the dining table, I realized that my dismay had been groundless, that her crisp accents and decisive gestures were but an outward indication of a native energy and a practical impatience with ideas and amusements which she regards as unassimilable and unstimulating.

In her big attic studio, its walls lined with books and pictures, Elsie Singmaster writes through the mornings and sometimes in the afternoons. There are comfortable chairs, a chintz-covered couch, the square desk at which she works, a fireplace in which logs burn on wintry mornings. The windows look out upon the seminary grounds and the ridge that marks the crest of the Confederate line. In her workroom there is always a sense of suspended effort, the typewriter uncovered on her desk, note-books and reference volumes close at hand; and she writes with her purpose clearly before her:

"In the beginning my characters have a somewhat shadowy personality, suggested by an acquaintance or some of the traits of an acquaintance, or perhaps by someone seen only for a few moments. They may have their origin in the exigencies of the plot in which they are to figure. As the story develops they develop with it, until they become rounded beings. If they are suggested by a living person, they are very apt to cease to resemble him or her and become entirely different beings."

That, however, is only a part of her literary method. Every detail that will add to the total effect of her story must be the exact detail for her purpose. The time of a sunrise in a certain year or the quarter of the moon on a specific date will require reference to calendars and almanacs. Mention of wild flowers blooming in season in a given locality must be verified by the note-books filled with personal and miscellaneous observations over a long period of years. When she was working on her juvenile story *You Make Your Own Luck*, I drove with her in hot midsummer over the old Spottswood Trail—the route her heroine would follow on foot—from Luray to Charlottesville, while she observed carefuly scenic details of that Virginia hill-country. But in the completed book I was surprised to see the small number of definite landmarks she had employed. She had discarded more details than she had used, but each remaining detail had been selected with discriminating care to convey a proper atmosphere and setting without clogging the action of her story. Miss Singmaster may be justly proud of her stories for children, for in them she exercises the same careful work-

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manship that characterizes her novels and short stories. She never "writes down" for younger readers.

Much of her work is never far removed from actuality. An airplane crash on a rocky hillside in the South Mountains, the repeated statement of a sick mountain woman that the falling craft had passed over her house with an "ill-doomed sound", a report that the dead aviators had been robbed—these few facts supplied the plot and characters for a story which eventually appeared in changed form under the title of "The Braggart". A new novel not yet announced for publication existed for years in her note-book as a single cryptic inscription, "Story at Auburn", after her creative fancy had been attracted by an old house which she has tenanted at last with characters of her creation in this latest novel.

There are a few characters who take form so vividly in her imagination that she can write of them in a series of stories that are like successive experiences from real life. Old Flo, that tiny, decrepit negress of great but uncertain age, is a character with whom she has dealt effectively in more than one story. There is also the typically Pennsylvania German auctioneer, veteran of a hundred country sales, who has become a character of boisterous humors and swaggering pretensions. Readers of the short stories in the volume of Mennonite tales, *Bred in the Bone*, will remember the shy Shindledecker sisters; short, broad Betsy and thin, stooping Tilly, almost childlike in their timidity and pride, whose unworldly wisdom and devout strength of character prove them superior to all tests of pain and passion and despair. Betsy and Tilly face without confusion of the spirit the experiences that befall them in the course of their apparently colorless existence: their subtle victory over the antique collector; the preservation of the world from impending doom when they cozen with rich food a lean and hungry prophet of the Judgment Day; their amusing lapse into a life of sin because Betsy has read a book of the "world's people" to Tilly, who is slowly going blind; the midnight sabotage of a bootlegger's truck. In her portrayal of the Shindledecker sisters Miss Singmaster has added much to our knowledge of life among the archaic, little-understood sects of the Amish Mennonites and Dunkers.

The themes of her seven published novels would appear slight indeed beside the full-bodied novel of character and incident, if one did not take into account the fact of her severe, economical style and a decided preference for a small group of characters in a plot that centers about a single situation. Her novels are deliberate patterns of compact prose, and in them she presents some of her most notable characterizations. There are docile, self-sacrificing Ellen Levis and gentle, devoted Anna Ruth, too innocent to perceive the evil of the world about her until she must struggle against the blemish in her own nature. Then there is the less admirable Bennett Malin, self-assured, without the saving grace of humor, who builds a false, bright world about himself on a weak foundation of literary theft, and the strange, unforgettable Basil Everman, a writer dead long before the story opens, but more real than any living personage to the group of people whose lives he influences after many years.

What Everybody Wanted marks her one departure from the familiar scenes and characters of midland Pennsylvania. This novel is pure comedy that smashes more than one household god of convention and tradition, and its setting is the quiet charm of one of those small Maryland towns often more Southern in atmosphere than any village of the deep South. What everybody wanted happens in this case to be Mr. Lucien, a matrimonial target for Mamma and Marian and Arietta Lee. With sly humor and pointed satire, Miss Singmaster pricks these fascinating bubbles of human vanity and desire. Mamma's opulent charms are rewarded by the hand of Mr. Obenchain, Arietta Lee gets her Lucien, and Marian, wisest of the three,

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takes Alexander Le Conte, a young musician who is in many ways the book's finest characterization. To read *What Everybody Wanted* is like passing through an old-fashioned fanlight doorway to find oneself upon the brilliantly lighted stage of an Oscar Wilde farce.

My own favorite among her books is *Gettysburg*, which I read for the first time years ago and which I came to admire more through association with the historic old town and its surroundings, a series of short stories that present realistically the great battle and its grim aftermath. Miss Singmaster discards the sentimental and picturesque trappings of war; her picture of bloody conflict is narrowed to its proper frame, the experiences of the common recruit on the battlefield and the excited senses of those whose peaceful lives and everyday affairs have been disrupted by the din of battle. She begins with the dismay that citizens of the town feel when they learn that a battle is to be fought on their land in the busy harvest season. Nothing could be more remote from the military pageantry of war. Pictures of those stirring days follow one another with the continuity of lantern slides. Many of the events are related in the spirit of retrospect—the broken substitute who had been cheated of glory and pay; Grandfather Myers, wounded at Chancellorsville, who watched from his bed the beginning of the Confederate retreat and saw the defeated ranks once more before he died; Gunner Criswell, who knows in his blindness that his name is missing from the roll of honor; Mary Bowman, who remembers without bitterness the death of her husband in the battle and her last view of Early on his white horse, a ghostly leader who led a ghostly host through the wind and wet on that retreat toward Hagerstown. Now, seventeen years after publication, *Gettysburg* is to appear in a new and enlarged edition.

Comprehension and simplicity are the outstanding qualities of Miss Singmaster's art. All of her books reflect her wide knowledge of people and places typically Pennsylvanian. While others have seen a source of humor in the Dunker and Mennonite "plain people", with their queer clothing and deep superstitions, their love feasts and unworldly aloofness, she has treated them with simple, direct realism and has brought together the quaintness and essential humanity of these people so that they become real individuals, not mere eccentric types. Her understanding attitude is shown also in her books for children, and the young literary aspirant has learned that she can be more than kind toward those who begin to put their ideas in words.

Elsie Singmaster can best be described as a writer of local color. That term, abused by literary critics of the past decade, is not meant for faint praise. The American scene is too vast for any one writer; for that reason we have a Ruth Suckow and a Glenway Wescott in the Middle West; a Julia Peterkin and a Du Bose Heyward in the new South, and an Elsie Singmaster in Pennsylvania. There the land has possessed her spirit and moulded the form of her art; it has colored her philosophy and her perceptions of life. Her writing, like the men and women of her books, is close to the soil, as austere and formalized as their ways, but true to the spirit of the time and place. Without the vigor of a Willa Cather or the sophistication of an Ellen Glasgow, she stands, nevertheless, in the front ranks of her contemporaries. She is content to get the sense and spirit of life into her work, and her novels and short stories bear the stamp of conscious and assured workmanship.

I do not know what Elsie Singmaster will write next. A story of the Seventh Day Baptists whose religious cloisters still stand at Ephrata would be an interesting contribution to our knowledge of the Pennsylvania German character. And I hope that she will some day write a novel of the Civil War. The novel of rural Pennsylvania in those days remains to be written; certainly her art could give a new meaning to a people and a period that she knows so well.

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THE THEATRE

THE THEATRE VERSUS CERTAIN ARTISTS OF THE THEATRE

by Francis Fergusson

THE THEATRE GUILD, unlike the Shubert Theatrical Corporation, calls itself "An organization for the production of plays of artistic merit". It is controlled solely by a board consisting of Miss Theresa Helburn, a lawyer, a banker, a designer, a director and an actress. The distinction from other producing organizations implied in the title has proved extremely profitable, in New York and even more in other cities, where the population looks to the Guild for its bi-monthly theatrical revelation. The Guild, in fact, is a crusade, which turned into a racket; virtue marrying the boss's daughter. But it is hard to see what the board means by artistic merit. Does the diversity of its membership explain its catholic taste? Or can it be that the benevolent glow of success enables it to perceive the good in everything? In the *Guild Magazine* we find an out-of-town subscriber writing to ask why the Guild produces no Molière—with the statement, however, that "the Guild deserves our gratitude and our support"; and the Guild replying modestly, and with a nice sense of its thorny responsibilities, says: "The Guild is always confronted with a difficulty in producing classical plays, owing to the more insistent demands of modern authorship". I eagerly seized this remark as a sign of what goes on behind the furrowed collective brow, and zealously attended to see what modern authorship it was that made such insistent claims. I found that S. Tretyakov, Maxwell Anderson, and the Siftons had taken precedence over Molière. The Siftons, who are intelligent and skilful journalists, have written a melodrama, *Midnight*, which is not nearly so good as *Grand Hotel*, though belonging to the same category of highbrow thriller; but the other two plays seem to deserve more careful consideration.

Roar China

S. Tretyakov, a Bolshevik propagandist, was the first author whom the Guild felt called upon to recognize. His play is a vicious attack, in poster colors, on Anglo-Saxon Imperialism in China. We see an American merchant trying to bully and exploit the Chinese with whom he does business. One of the coolies pushes him into the harbor, and he drowns, being unable to swim. The commander of the British warship anchored in the harbor takes a terrible vengeance on the town, not that he loves the American but simply that he hates and fears the Chinese. A couple of Chinamen are garroted before our eyes. All of which might at least have been exciting if any of the characters had been credible. But it is impossible to get very excited at the torturing of an abstraction, the generalized coolie by the generalized and caricatured British militarist.

Probably the authorship the Guild had in mind was that of the director rather than

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the writer. Meyerhold directed it in Russia, and Mr. Biberman here. The scene is a dock in the harbor with coolies loading merchandise and the warship in the background. There was an excellent opportunity for the use of Russian methods in handling stage mobs. The coolies might have been shown angry, afraid, discouraged, mourning. A good director trained in Moscow methods could, by neglecting the script a little, make a kind of poem out of the changing moods of the crowd, as Mr. Mamoulian did a few years ago with the Negroes in *Porgy*; as Mr. Boleslavsky did in *Moneypenney*, as Mr. Bulgakov did in his copy of the Moscow Art Theatre production of Gorki's *Lower Depths*. Mr. Biberman, who is a student of these devices, evidently intended to use them here. He was experimenting with mob scenes as long ago as last year in *Red Rust*, and he had the advantage of seeing Meyerhold's production of *Roar China*. I cannot find out how much he owes to the Meyerhold production, and the question is perhaps unimportant. The refinement of having real Chinamen to play the coolies was advertised as his.

In any case, the result pompously displayed on the stage of the Martin Beck, was unbearably loud, pretentious and crude. Mr. Biberman is one of those who identify strength with mere yelling. Mr. Biberman's real Chinamen were for two or three hours straining their lungs and their neck muscles. One looks for the extremes of emotion in the theatre; but really deep emotion has background, color, contour. It was more than a little embarrassing to see this flat simulacrum savored in public by the congratulating and congratulated subscribers.

Elizabeth the Queen

The second play of the season was as different as possible from the first. Mr. Maxwell Anderson has written a subtle, carefully worked-out study of the aging Queen and her young lover Essex. He shows them deeply in love, but separated by their ambitions for the throne, which stands between them. They both insist on ruling; it is Elizabeth who wins, at the expense of her life as a woman; and Essex who goes to the block.

Mr. Anderson showed great ingenuity in some of the scenes, especially in the one in the second act where Elizabeth betrays Essex. The question between them, when Essex returns from Ireland at the head of an army, is whether they shall trust each other and so put their love ahead of their politics, or fight it out as rivals for the throne. Elizabeth realizes that neither of them can relinquish ambition; and then uses Essex's love for her to trap him into giving up his power. In the mere plot or story of this scene Mr. Anderson evinces genuinely first-rate qualities. He has clarity and a mastery of situation: the scenario is a brilliant success.

But in working out the language and the minor characters in a play about Elizabeth, Mr. Anderson ran into the unmanageable big ghosts of Elizabethan drama, and that was his undoing. His theme and the skilful scene in Act II are more like Ibsen than Shakespeare; but Mr. Anderson felt obliged to trick out the tale with bawds, varlets, and other odds and ends of Elizabethan trappings. He tried to fake the famous Elizabethan gusto, and so gave away the whole show. Worst of all, he wrote in a kind of relaxed, prosaic blank verse, with a phrase or two from Marlowe at high points. Now there is good blank verse being written nowadays, by Mr. Pound, by Mr. Eliot, who has studied the Elizabethans with the utmost care. If Mr. Anderson would only study them, he might work out a language that fitted his themes; and then we might hope for something genuinely important.

It was the pseudo-Elizabethanism that caught the eye of the producers. Mr. Simonson, the designer, committed the same kind of ineptitude in this play as he did in *Volpone*: he managed to make the English Renaissance look like a comfortable "period" breakfast-nook. And the director, Mr. Moel-

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ler, tried for a kind of sing-song diction in honor of Mr. Anderson's blank verse. Mr. Lunt, as Essex, apparently could not be induced to sing *his* lines, and he came out as very young in a slightly Middle-Western way. Mr. Lunt has given some excellent performances in modern parts, but he looks a little embarrassed when he puts on a costume. Miss Fontanne, on the other hand, had a very true and deep characterization, and may be said to have put the play across almost single-handed. But she took the singing speech more seriously, and achieved a monotony of diction through which it was often difficult to feel her fine performance. The rest of the cast were easy, complacent Guild support.

Four One-Woman Theatres

There is of course no question of blaming the Guild for its miscellaneous repertory. Perhaps the best way to put the difficulty of forming a permanent theatre with artistic, as distinguished from commercial, importance, would be to point out that no particular kind of play seems more significant in New York than any other. But though neither the Guild nor anybody else in sight can give us a real theatre, we can still be clear that the Guild's paternal solicitude for "artistic merit" is nothing whatever but disheartening complacency.

The same lack of theatrical standards and traditions which accounts for an institution like the Guild, drives certain artists of strong individuality to form little solo theatres. Gordon Craig has a theoretical one-man theatre. In this country Ruth Draper with her monologues and Angna Enters with her dance compositions have their own single-handed repertories. La Argentina, the Spanish dancer, and Mary Wigman, the German dancer, are their European relatives. I describe them briefly here to compare them with the Guild and with each other. To get a tantalizing picture of what the Guild fails to be, visualize a group of playwrights, actors, designers and directors all serving a theatre convention as definite as that of one of these individuals.

Angna Enters

Miss Enters is perhaps the best example of a complete individual theatre. She uses no words, but she uses plot, music, movement and costume to realize her compositions. She has learned theatre like Reinhardt; she has ransacked the history of painting like a miniature Picasso. She will stage a French Gothic Virgin to music by Gautier de Coinci, in an excellent costume designed by herself; identifying herself with the figure, making it her own, and at the same time subtly commenting upon its significance to the population that invented it. Or she will do a sixteenth-century Spanish pavane, in black velvet and gold, contrasting the formality of the dance with the sullen rebelliousness of the dancer, and summing up the whole portrait at the end with a superstitious terrified crossing of herself: a woman who submits and hates. Nobody understands rebellion better than she, and nobody better understands the hieratically enthroned Virgin-Mother.

I am not surprised to learn from a recent issue of the *Drama Magazine* that she has worked out an elaborate esthetic. I cannot summarize it here because the *Drama Magazine* publishes only extracts from a longer essay; and besides, it seems that Miss Enters is more comprehensible in her dancing than in her writing. She has, however, a neat analysis of the German school of dancing started by Mary Wigman, which I here reproduce.

Mary Wigman

"The synthetic birth of the German movement may be summed up, roughly, in the following equation: The modernist aspect of the Russian Ballet, plus Duncan, plus Dalcroze, plus post-war Expressionist-Disillusionist heroics plus Health (a sun-soul worship) Hallelujahs, spiced verbally with diluted Nietzsche or any handy high-sounding philosophy: equals *Die Moderne Tanz*."

I cannot say that Miss Enters meant this to apply specifically to Miss Wigman; but I

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understand the latter initiated *Die Moderne Tanz*, and after seeing her and Kreutzberg I can see how the definition would apply. Miss Wigman herself is the least theatrical of the dancers I have mentioned, and represents rather the Health aspect of the movement. Her costumes, which sometimes are well suited to show her movements, are inept as costumes. Her dances have no interesting emotional or intellectual structure, and create no character. For music she uses a piano and percussions, which do no more than accompany and emphasize her rhythms. Miss Wigman is interested in mood and rhythm, especially mood. Her dances are called *Pastorale, Festive Rhythm, Storm Song*—names of moods. She seems consciously to reject the background and richness of association which would be hers if she ever used theme, character, or traditional forms. But she has extraordinary bodily control, and delight in movement for its own sake. So far as I can discover, her influence has been mainly in the development of body training, at least in this country, where her disciples disdain the ballet and move from some point near the middle of the body. Harald Kreutzberg, who is said to have been her pupil in Germany, has adapted some of her methods to more strictly stage purposes.

La Argentina

La Argentina, in comparison with Miss Enters and Miss Wigman, is as joyous and straightforward as a child. Her beautiful Spanish costumes from Paris; her snappy tunes; her large, brilliant stage presence; her clear, sharp characterizations—for La Argentina, like Miss Enters, acts her dances—her shining vitality and her decrepitating pep, will heat up any audience to stamping and yelling. I am told she is more Parisian than Spanish, and that her technique leaves something to be desired, but, being a theatre all by herself, she has her own inner logic, her own conventions and irresistible enthusiasms.

Ruth Draper

With Miss Draper we return to these shores, and to the private American nightmare, which has no counterpart abroad, even among the Germans. The little unofficial and unsung native infernos are Miss Draper's special province. Her monologues include a Maine peasant, rocking on the front porch and testifying to the decay of the countryside, and the latest brand of débutante, with affected English accent, screams of enthusiasm, childish honesty and timidity, all complete. They are excellent in the *tranche de vie* style, with the interest focused sternly on the object, and the implications as far as possible unstated. It would be hard to say whether Miss Draper feels the implications, and the question is irrelevant so long as she confines herself to her fine, sharp little portraits. But she gets out of her depth when she tries for a one-act play. *In a Railroad Station on the Western Plains* is not a success, in spite of her technical mastery in building up a whole story, and establishing many different characters, with no one but herself on the stage.

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FICTION

IMPERIAL PALACE *by Arnold Bennett* (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. $2.50)

GRAND HOTEL *by Vicki Baum* (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. $2.50)

ALL that these novels have in common is the fact that in either case most of the action takes place in a luxury hotel. The difference between them is somewhat more pointed. For *Grand Hotel* is a novel with many virtues and any number of obvious faults, and *Imperial Palace* is a faultless piece of literary ingenuity with scarcely any virtues at all.

One uses "faultless" in relation to *Imperial Palace* because there is no escaping from Mr. Bennett's craftsmanship; and "ingenuity" because he almost succeeds in making an excellent piece of journalism look like a great novel. The book's one virtue lies in the fact that Mr. Bennett knows more about the interior economy of a great hotel than any other writer alive; its great and particular vice in the fact that he is more a slave to this hotel than any of the characters which inhabit it and with whose slavery he pretends to be so concerned. There is a plot—a triangular affair between the manager of this vast hotel, the daughter of a millionaire financier, and the head floor-housekeeper—which, though eminently suited to the sort of slight novel which Bennett is quite incapable of writing, is, when stretched upon the rack of seven hundred pages, a very disjointed and attenuated business. And for the innumerable characters which inhabit these pages—no detail has been spared to give them an appearance of life, but they are one and all irreproachably and completely dead. The tale of floors, elevators, cellars, laundries, furniture factories, restaurants, grill rooms, china, linen, and the rest is altogether too much for them. And so if you class this book—as it appears you must—with other informative books on subjects like etiquette or cookery, it is an unusual and I think a very distinguished piece of work: but as a novel it can scarcely be said to have any existence at all.

If in *Imperial Palace* the characters are a competent excuse for the hotel, in *Grand Hotel* the hotel is a perfectly legitimate excuse for the characters. That is to say, if you want to bring six separate lives into some sort of relationship, a hotel is a very convenient place to do it in. This implies that the plot itself is rather mechanical, not only in the succession of incidents but in the relating and disposition of characters. And this again implies that the characters themselves are not particularly original. Kringelein for instance—the poor middle-aged bookkeeper who, being told by his doctor that he has only a few weeks to live, comes to Berlin to spend a lifetime's savings. Kringelein is as old as Aristophanes and has been rather over-used in these humanitarian days when we have ceased to laugh at him and stayed to sympathize. A young baron who is also an expert jewel thief, the bookkeeper's employer, a famous ballerina, a stenographer, and a melancholy doctor who has been disfigured in the war, make up the tale. They do the expected thing rather nicely; for *Grand Hotel* is, on the face of it, a good, straightforward melodrama, told with unusual skill and distinguished by an acute perception of minor detail. It is precisely the kind of story which the reader would prefer to find out for himself. But

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it is also—and eminently—a piece of life. For every one of these rather "stock" characters is given now and again a profound and unique experience, and this experience is communicated to us in terms of experiences that are common to us all. Surely by this we distinguish the greater from the lesser novel.

There is one obvious conclusion to be drawn from a comparison between these two books. *Imperial Palace* proves once and for all that Arnold Bennett neither was nor is nor ever will be a great novelist. But from the evidence of *Grand Hotel,* Vicki Baum is quite possibly on her way to becoming one.

GEORGE DANGERFIELD

MACKEREL SKY *by Helen Ashton* (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. $2.00)

IN HER latest novel, the author of *Dr. Serocold* continues her deft light studies of people in respect to their frames of mind. By way of a subtitle Miss Ashton calls her story "A Conversation Piece". And before Elizabeth and Gilbert Falkland (married five years) are through talking and their relatives are through talking with and about them, we are thoroughly familiar with their diverse natures, with their respective mental and emotional turns and twists. These two are the kind of fictional characters who, after a lapse of time, bob up in our memories as actual persons whom, for the moment, we cannot quite place.

The virtues of such clean-cut etching are obvious. The faults, of course, are in the direction of over-simplification. Too little of the contrariness and mystery of individuality is indicated. But this is a clever and an intelligently contrived story. The portraits of Gilbert, the brilliant but somewhat spoiled young man who writes novels, and Elizabeth, the capable but somewhat unimaginative young wife who has a job and is going to have a baby, who appreciates her husband's work without quite understanding it, but who finds a limit to her patience, are as charmingly realistic as nicely shaded photographs. And the quarrelings, reconciliations, bickerings, the whole daily routine, described to us, for the most part, in a series of key dialogues, seem just a little more real than actuality itself.

FRED T. MARSH

THE RING OF THE LÖWENSKÖLDS *by Selma Lagerlöf* (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. $3.00)

THE name of the trilogy comprising *The General's Ring, Charlotte Löwensköld,* and *Anna Svärd* is *The Ring of the Löwensköld*s. The first is a simple ghost story, laid in the eighteenth century. As a reward for his services in the Swedish army General Löwensköld is given a huge ring by Charles XII. Soon after the general's death in 1741 this ring is stolen from his grave, and for the next fifty years the story concerns itself with the ruin of whoever is unfortunate enough to secure possession of the ring. The other two novels are both laid in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and concern themselves with the relations of Karl Arthur Ekenstedt, a descendant of the general, with three women. The first of these is the charming Charlotte Löwensköld, his fiancée for five years. The second is Anna Svärd, peasant girl, whom he marries because she is the first woman he meets after breaking his troth with Charlotte. The third is the sinister Thea Sundler, who has a particularly pernicious effect upon his religious heart.

Karl Arthur himself is the principal contribution that Fru Lagerlöf has made in these novels. No one can help being moved by the dual soul of this young clergyman who in his frenzied desire to "follow Christ" succeeds only in estranging his sweetheart, embittering his wife, killing his mother—returning the love of those near him, in other words, with the most wilful perversity. The ruin that he brings down upon himself reminds one of the ruin of the Mayor of Casterbridge, for each of these tragic characters

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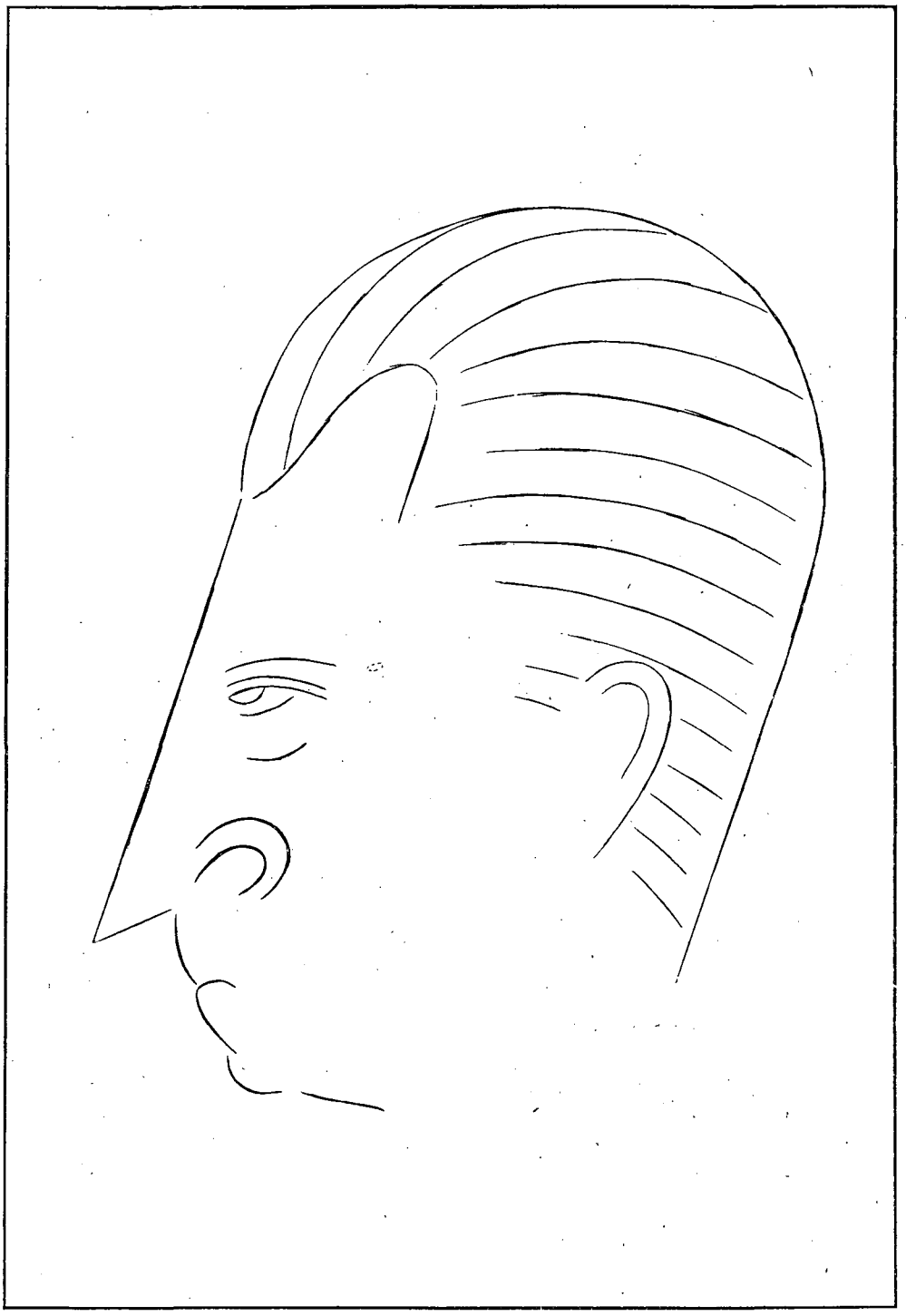

OSBERT SITWELL

Caricature by Eva Herrmann

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is similarly the victim of himself. The treatment of this theme by Fru Lagerlöf is in no way comparable, however, to the treatment given it by Hardy. At times it almost seems that she takes sides against the tortured Karl Arthur with the complacent Charlotte and the wealthy ironmaster whom Charlotte marries, that she does not appreciate that despite his misdeeds Karl Arthur is more important —and even better—than the others. It is true that this very lapse on the part of the author serves to accentuate the unhappy reception that such a man as Karl Arthur is sure to meet with in life, so that one wonders at moments whether it was not the product of an unconscious subtlety. Perhaps, during certain chapters, it was; but I do not believe that it can be attributed to a steadfast artistic intention on Fru Lagerlöf's part. The truth is that her intention fails to communicate itself, for the reason that it is uncertain and subject to change. On the whole it might be said that her limitations are artistic. She has an engaging manner, a good knowledge of people, and a story-telling knack; but she has not that sense of style which would permit us to follow a clear line throughout the whole of her work. She lets anything enter her work which suits her purpose of the moment: folk-lore, melodrama, symbolism, spooks. As a result, her work is provincial, and of her trilogy nothing remains except, in the character of Karl Arthur, the reminder of a possibility.

GERALD SYKES.

THE LIONS' DEN *by Janet Ayer Fairbank* (BOBBS-MERRILL. $2.50)

JANET AYER FAIRBANK presents an American idealist in conflict with American political opportunism. Daniel Carson, farmer, is elected by the Twelfth Congressional District of Wisconsin to fill a vacancy in the House of Representatives. He arrives in Washington with a high pulse; Bob La Follette is his hero and he is eager to help solve agricultural problems. At the end of his first day he is earnest and perplexed for "he wanted tremendously to do the right thing —to be at least adequate in this new and delightful job of being a congressman".

This is the forecast of the inevitable, and quite steadily Mrs. Fairbank develops Dan's dilemma. As he becomes important he becomes beset by chicanery as determined as it is polite, and he learns that integrity is considered another name for naïveté. To add to his confusion his senses have betrayed him and he is infatuated with Corinne, a senator's wife. The complication is completed by his margin speculations at a time when the market has reached its most perilous best. But despite its surface realism *The Lions' Den* is a romance and everything turns out happily in the middle.

Unfortunately Mrs. Fairbank's skill as a writer is not equal to her familiarity with the political scene, nor is it equal to her belief in simple goodness of character. *The Lions' Den* is a clear, straightforward narrative, but it is not alive, and it is not so important as the material with which it is concerned.

NANCY EVANS

RACHEL MOON *by Lorna Rea* (HARPERS. $2.50)

MRS. REA'S first book, the rather brilliant *Six Mrs. Greenes*, a successful *tour de force*, seems to me better than her second. In *Six Mrs. Greenes* there was exceptional character creation, sketching with delicate, sure strokes, a delightful humor that had the right touch of malice, and a subtle understanding. In *Rachel Moon* there are some of these qualities; there are some beautifully written scenes, there are some finely drawn characters, but the novel does not measure up to one's expectation. The central character, although plausible, even convincing as a type, never is completely realized; her portrait is too blurred, too romantically beau-

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tiful and silly, like the ladies of Rossetti's paintings, to be very real as an individual. One understands the psychological problem that besets her (perhaps it is stated, emphasized, too much) but it does not seem inevitably compelling. Rachel is not quite stupid enough to be the romantic, self-sacrificing fool we are told she is, nor unselfish enough. Her surrender of love and desires for happiness to nurse her paralyzed, completely unconscious mother (who is provided with every medical attention and care possible, and much of Rachel's attention is really futile, and an impertinence) does not seem real. Rachel, given the intelligence we know she has, in spite of the author's insistence on her foolishness, would not have been so extreme; romantics are selfish, when the final issue is clearly drawn. Rachel is no exception; the author justifies her falseness by making her self-sacrifice become an affectation. True, it often does. But we are not persuaded of the inevitability in Rachel's case. Perdita, her young sister, is much more deftly and surely drawn. Clive is an interesting, but very sketchy portrait of a young modern scientist. The other characters are not more than puppets, and stock figures, at that, but interesting and amusing puppets have an originality of their own.

COLEY TAYLOR

DAUGHTERS *by Gabriele Reuter* (MACMILLAN. $2.00)

THIS is a full rich study of the difficult period of readjustment in post-war Germany. Dorothea Cardenius, wife of an eminent scholar, is left a widow in Berlin, just before the war, with two daughters and a niece in her care. Even she, wise, kind and tolerant, is unable to save them from the fever, cynicism and despair which was the tragic heritage of their generation. Petra, the eldest daughter, impatient of advice, passionately desiring to experiment with life, flounders through various unhappy love affairs, growing always more bitter and disillusioned and offering constant rebuff to her mother's love with the attitude of harsh indifference which she has assumed as protective armor. Mariana loses her lover because she has a nature too full, too eager to give, and utterly unable to cope with the intricacies and subtleties of the life around her. Helge, the youngest, a sweet, calm child, for whom it seems life will hold no complications, suddenly falls under the influence of a deadly and unscrupulous woman who causes her destruction. Ultimately, it is only to the wayward Petra, who worked out her own salvation, that happiness comes.

FRANCES GREEN

EVA *by Jacques Chardonne* (SIMON & SCHUSTER. $2.00)

JACQUES CHARDONNE'S latest book is by no means an easy one to classify or to judge. Undoubtedly influenced by André Gide and, like Gide himself, by Montaigne, this "interrupted diary" forms a short *récit* similar to *The School for Wives*, recounting the life of two people and told by one of the protagonists. But this particular diary was written not so much to give pleasure or instruction to others as to allow the author to put his experiences in order, to get some perspective from which, as he says, to look at himself. Consequently *Eva* often trespasses on the domain of the essay with frequent reflections on man and society which, though they lack Montaigne's mellowness, are none the less sincere and provocative—for when an intelligent man withdraws from the world to take an inventory of himself it is almost inevitable that his results, if stated without dogmatism, should suggest a wider application than he at first suspected.

Eva tells the story of an extraordinarily self-conscious and apparently blind husband's sacrifice of himself to a wife who does not love him. "Man knows love only by the losses he suffers on account of it"; and woman, insatiable, accepts everything as her

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lawful tribute and is still hungry after swallowing the man who adores her. When one has said this one has said all. As a story it is above all tragic and true; its bitter irony never finds its way into words but lies rather in the manner of the telling. The pitiful husband writes with the wisdom of the fool. The difference between Chardonne and Gide is that Chardonne hits the mark with every sentence while subtly pretending to leave great gaps for the reader to fill in, whereas Gide merely hints at his point and then timidly avoids it, leaving the reader in uncertainty. One never has the desire to shake Chardonne's hero roughly and demand: "See here! What sort of game are you playing, anyway?" In other words, his restraint is admirably calculated.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN

BACK STREET *by Fannie Hurst* (COSMOPOLITAN. $2.50)

THIS is one of those stories of real life which begin with a fresh young girl and conclude with a faded hag who dies, in a macabre, Zolaesque way, with a bubble on her mouth. This particular tale opens in the nineties in the German quarter of Cincinnati. The heroine, Ray Schmidt, is brave and handsome, but too easy-going to secure her own good. Though strictly virtuous, she permits the men liberties which give her the reputation of being "fly". What she is really doing is waiting for "Mr. Right". But Mr. Right, when at last he appears, is a Jew, and after the fashion of his race, he marries, not Ray, but a Jewess. With her burden of disappointment Ray goes to New York, where after several years her lover, now a prosperous married man, reappears. She becomes his mistress, in which capacity she serves him for twenty years or more. He dies without having left proper provision for her, and Ray disintegrates—not morally but physically: "A ruin, if you must, but one with a straight back". Passing through the dyed-hair and false-teeth stages, she comes to an end among the gaming tables and gay decadent whirl of a French Watering Place—one of those places which stand in novels as symbols for degradation and uprootedness, and which the novelist need not describe but only name to evoke the desired responses.

It is the aim of such novels to give a sense of life as it appears when, in the grip of a hang-over or a late-afternoon depression, one harks mistily back over the courses of one's own life. Miss Hurst exploits to the full this evanescent mood, and colors her whole novel in its sentimental vapors. She passes swiftly over all the occasions where choice enters, where drama is latent, and dwells in close detail upon the long inactive periods between. The popularity of this type of book, and of Miss Hurst's work in particular, is an indication that the realistic novel has taken the place of romance, and incidentally, or perhaps consequently, entered its decline. *Back Street* is in no real sense realistic; it is as unreal as any cream-puff from the kitchens of George Barr McCutcheon. But it has all the trappings of Balzac and Zola—and it is the trappings of a type of art which today become popular.

FREDERICK DUPEE

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BIOGRAPHY

H. G. WELLS *by Geoffrey West* (NORTON. $3.00)

MR. WEST has given us a full, well-documented, and intelligent literary biography of his subject. We learn all that one is likely to want to know about Wells the man, but biographical criticism of the books is primary.

When we think of Wells's continued fertility in and hopefulness about schemes for world regeneration, when we consider his loquacity, his delight in every new thing, his buoyancy, we may be justified in naming him the perennial adolescent of English letters. Wells himself frankly calls his work journalism; and in the sense that it deals with the things of the day rather than of all time, and deals most effectively with the surface of life, it is exactly that. Certainly we are led to ask ourselves whether, in spite of an extraordinary visual imagination, great intelligence, and wide knowledge, this boyishness of Wells's is not a sign of a fundamental lack of seriousness. To contrast him with a novelist whom the reviewer is far from admiring in most things—D. H. Lawrence—is to see the difference between a writer whose intelligence is far greater than his emotional nature, and one whose emotions, however warped, were deep and mature; whose attitude toward life, however unsatisfactory, was fundamentally and impressively serious.

Such considerations are lent weight by this study. Though it is the work of a youthful admirer, it is excellently judicial, and honest in presenting much that to a less favorably disposed reader of Wells will seem distinctly damaging. A comparison of Wells to Dickens, for example, reminds us sharply of matters wherein the latter was most ephemeral—his social criticisms; and of what is nearest immortality in him—his power of humorous characterization. Dickens is inferior in the former; vastly greater in the latter. He was, in fact, interested in human beings; Wells is interested in mechanisms. But novelists live beyond their day by reason of their humanity. Even such a book as *Kipps*, in which Wells is most Dickensian, excellent as it is, seems, when compared to the immortal *Pickwick*, narrow, verbose, relatively feeble in humor, style, and imagination. One might even prefer *Merton of the Movies* as a study of a "poor sap".

Again, Mr. West calls *Tono-Bungay* "one of the two or three great English novels of this century". A fresh reading leaves us unable to understand such a judgment. Inspired by Mr. West's praise, we took up *Tono-Bungay* with liveliest anticipations, only to find the novel wearisomely long-winded about affairs of the day and place—which are not ours; disunified in theme; awkwardly solemn about a musical comedy plot; melodramatic in its close. We can whole-heartedly praise three or four characterizations and numerous vivid passages; but the novel as a whole, like others of Wells's, is a careless throwing together of parts of half a dozen stories along with sociological discussions which are not only dated but are less witty and penetrating than similar passages in Shaw and Aldous Huxley.

Mr. West interestingly suggests in Wells a conflict between an artistic temperament and scientific training and intellect. At first the former dominated, making possible the author's best work. Now that the latter prevails Wells has become useful mainly as

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a "social irritant". Certainly his novels have come to be more and more mere tracts for the times.

A more fundamental criticism, which Mr. West does not enlarge upon, is that Wells strikingly illustrates the effect upon the artist of whole-hearted acceptance of the naturalistic scepticism of our age. His scientific training left him a disbeliever in the traditional standards of life; and his ardent espousal of one new panacea after another would seem the groping of a spirit adrift in the flux of nature. It is thoroughly consistent with such a spirit that he should say, as quoted by Mr. West: "All art, all science, and still more certainly all writing are experiments in statement. There will come a time for every work of art when it will have served its purpose and be bereft of its last rag of significance". We may well believe it, at all events, of a writer so engrossed in the changing surface of life as Wells.

ALAN REYNOLDS THOMPSON

UNDIPLOMATIC MEMORIES *by William Franklin Sands* (WHITTLESEY HOUSE. $3.00)

FIRST as secretary at our legation in Seoul and then as adviser to the Emperor, Mr. Sands spent the eight years preceding the Russo-Japanese war in Korea. His memories consequently cover one of the most critical periods in the recent history of the Far East, while from the vantage point of the Korean capital he was in a particularly strategic position to follow that conflict of policy which led to the clash between Russia and Japan. Nevertheless as an "undiplomatic" exposure of the tactics of the two nations struggling for control of Korea his book is a distinct disappointment. Its value and its interest lie primarily in the picture which Mr. Sands draws of Korean life and customs, government and internal development, during the opening years of the century.

Within this field the author has an interesting story to tell, while his personal experiences invariably make good reading. His position in the Korean Court was an unusual one. It is not apparent that he was able to exert much influence upon the Emperor, he was more or less suspect by both the Russian and Japanese legations, and in view of the policy of strict neutrality followed by the American minister he could look for no support in that direction, yet despite these handicaps the goal toward which he constantly strived was Korean independence under a modern, enlightened administration. His failure was inevitable, no less because of the incapacity of the Emperor than because of the ambitions of Japan, and for him the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese war meant deportation.

Throughout these years, however, his contacts with the rival legations in Seoul, his residence in the Imperial Palace and friendship with Korean nobles, his travels throughout the country, afforded him marvellous opportunities to observe and record every phase of life in the Hermit Kingdom. These he did not neglect, and, spiced with personal adventure and personal anecdote, the resulting descriptions are both entertaining and informative. His book is neither travel, history nor autobiography, but it has the flavor of each one of these three forms of writing and will make its appeal to any reader whose interest in such books is supplemented by an interest in the Far East.

NELSON W. ALDRICH *by Nathaniel Wright Stephenson* (SCRIBNER'S. $5.00)

MR. STEPHENSON has written far more than a biography in this life of Senator Aldrich. It is a political history of the very highest order covering the entire period of his subject's public career. Relying largely upon manuscript material hitherto unavailable, he has been able to trace with remarkable fidelity the tortuous course of our politics through

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the presidencies of Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt and Taft. It is the story of the elder statesmen in control of the Republican Party, the remarkable rule of the "Four"—Aldrich, Platt, Allison and Spooner.

Senator Aldrich was chiefly interested in the tariff and financial reform and it is consequently these subjects upon which Mr. Stephenson places the most emphasis. The issue of imperialism, which made such a great change in America's outlook at the close of the century, is treated brilliantly but briefly. Far more detailed and complete—in fact we doubt if the story can ever be told more faithfully—is the account of that interplay of political forces which centered upon the free-silver movement and the eventual adoption of the gold standard, the tariff of 1897, and the origins of the Federal Reserve movement. As a life of Senator Aldrich the book suffers from the limitations of too great an absorption in politics, though it must be admitted that politics was life and breath for Senator Aldrich. As political history it is as revealing a document as any American historian has produced in many years.

FOSTER RHEA DULLES

LUTHER *by Heinrich Boehmer* (DIAL PRESS. $5.00)

THE late Dr. Boehmer was recognized in Germany as an authority on Protestantism. The contrast between Martin Luther and St. Ignatius Loyola particularly fascinated him, and he devoted several volumes to the great Reformer and the great Jesuit. The present study of Luther, the full title of which is *Luther and the Reformation in the Light of Modern Research*, was written in 1904, although the present translation is made from the edition of 1918, which was double the size of the original volume. Since in recent years most of our importations of this nature, when partisan, have expressed the Catholic point of view, it is interesting and somewhat surprising to hear a Lutheran hold forth on Luther. Dr. Boehmer zealously defends his subject against charges of drunkenness, venereal diseases, bad scholarship; and even inserts an appendix to put in a word for the Reformer's father, Hans Luther, who has been accused of manslaughter. The impartial reader, in fact, is disappointed when he finds that, despite Dr. Boehmer's scientific approach and indubitable gifts, his point of view on a controversial issue can inevitably be anticipated: he is always for Luther. Even his admissions—such as that Luther's thinking was not systematic, or that there was a "tragic moment" in the later life of Luther when he reverted to "medievalism" and compromised his earlier work—seem to have been written by a policy-minded churchman rather than by a disinterested critic. Dr. Boehmer's *Luther* is not a biography, since it does not attempt to relate the facts of Luther's life or to recreate him as a man. It is a tract on a subject with which the reader is supposed to be already acquainted; and it is written from a definite point of view. As such, since Dr. Boehmer was an outstanding theological scholar and an able dialectician, it will be of unquestionable value to all who have a special interest in the field.

A SKETCH OF MY LIFE *by Thomas Mann* (HARRISON OF PARIS. $2.50)

MARIO AND THE MAGICIAN *by Thomas Mann* (KNOPF. $1.50)

THERE are those who place Thomas Mann, among the writers of the twentieth century, second only to James Joyce and Marcel Proust. And with reason; for what work of our day, aside from *Ulysses* and *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, is more pertinent or more masterly than *The Magic Mountain* or *Death in Venice*? The solidity of his achievement has impressed even the conventional-minded, which is all the more remarkable in a time when a worth-while

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artist can hope for hardly more than professional appreciation. Since the nature of his work is manifestly traditional, therefore, the nature of his reward has been the same; and so having passed his fiftieth birthday, like his own Gustav von Aschenbach, he has "acquired the dignity which, as he insisted, is the innate goad and craving of every great talent". This dignity, indeed the whole figure of Aschenbach, becomes particularly significant now that Mann himself has caught up in years with his creation of almost two decades ago. For we now see with axiomatic clarity that when he looked inward for Aschenbach he looked ahead for himself: in telling the story of the downfall of the imaginary German writer whose style had been set up as a model in the school readers he foretold a real downfall of his own. The ruin which overtook the moribund Aschenbach on the sands at Lido was no more disastrous (except that it was final) than the ruin—inward but none the less real—which, in *A Sketch of My Life*, has overtaken the living Mann.

Death in Venice lends itself to the interpretation of both of these latest works from its author's hand. To its relation to *A Sketch of My Life* we shall return later. *Mario and the Magician*, a short story written in 1929, might be described as a miniature *Death in Venice*. The narrator and his wife—who seem undisguisedly to be Herr and Frau Mann—go with their two young children to Torre di Venere, a resort on the Tyrrhenian Sea. One evening, after the setting—pleasant enough for anyone else but ominous to Mann—has been sketched in, they take the children to the performance of a magician. This magician, the deformed and embittered Cavaliere Cipolla, slowly reveals himself to be a hypnotist, and after performing several feats of suggestion, as a climax induces Mario, a waiter at the Grand Hotel, under the temporary delusion that Cipolla is his sweetheart, to kiss him in full view of the audience. Mario, on awaking from his trance, is horrified and kills Cipolla. Most of Mann's art is expended on Cipolla, who becomes remarkably vivid at certain moments.

One must be brave to say it: the story is a failure. Mann, who has told us in *Death in Venice* that he is happiest with an "idea which can become all emotion, an emotion all idea", in this portrait of Cipolla has stepped out of bounds. Cipolla is vivid and well drawn, but he lacks significance. He lacks significance because he lacks idea. It is necessary for a Mann character to have idea because Mann's art is philosophic in nature: a kind of symbolism which becomes esthetic—usually—through the communication of a physical apprehensiveness peculiar to the author. (*Vide* the fear of tuberculosis at the extraordinary beginning of *The Magic Mountain*; the cholera, indeed everything in *Death in Venice;* the revealing shaving incident in *Tonio Kröger*.) In Cipolla, obviously, Mann conveys plenty of physical apprehension—but no symbol. As for Mario, he lacks even substance. Except for two brief early mentions, he is introduced only twelve small pages from the end, and the reader does not have a chance so much as to get used to him before he is at the center of what is supposed to be a tragedy. The climax, the grotesque kiss, altogether misses fire, awakens no emotional response.

Not that too much consequence should be attached to the failure of *Mario*, which is after all the result of nothing more than a miscalculation of strength. Mann has failed before, as in *Royal Highness*, and the world has forgiven him for it. But his *Sketch of My Life* is another matter. Here he has really betrayed himself—or been betrayed—by his "craving for dignity".

The simple reader will exclaim at the end of this autobiography: "How conceited he is!" and perhaps also: "How bourgeois!" And one is unquestionably struck by the satisfaction he takes in the honors which have come to him, as well as his unconcealed purpose in recounting his life to give it the

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appearance of having been the acme of comfort and, above all, regularity. (He takes a positive pride in the fact that as a child he was fed with "many-coursed table d'hôte meals"!) This, of course, particularly the emphasis on bourgeois respectability, is merely a continuation of that tendency which we have already observed in *Buddenbrooks, Tonio Kröger*, the essay "Marriage in Transition", and even in *Mario*, to set up German family life over bohemianism as a standard of conduct. We cannot but respect this favorite theme, since it is at the heart of Mann's personal drama and has been responsible for some of his most valuable contributions. But the simple reader is justified in his complaint that this time Mann has gone too far—so far that he has compromised his idea and exposed some fatal errors.

The simple reader is right, as usual, but he has not gone deep enough. He has not perceived that this affirmation of the bourgeois standard has been growing for some time increasingly conscious, that now it simply has come altogether into the open. And in the matter of Mann's conceit, he has not perceived that this also is conscious, that Mann in his autobiography has made a principle of conceit. In effect what Mann says here amounts to: "The way to be the *best kind of writer* is to be conceited". But we are in danger of being misbelieved. No one who has not read this *Sketch* will credit the bare statement that Thomas Mann has put himself in such an absurd position.

How else, however, are we to interpret an autobiography to which truth-telling, self-revelation, are only incidental, the chief aim of which is to *prove* that one's life has been successful and happy? It is impossible for a man of the spirit to discuss himself except to make a confession. If he attempts, as Mann attempts here, not to reveal himself but to create a rôle for himself, invariably we overlook the rôle, however true in externals it is, and find the revelation. We are not interested in what the author *wants* us to believe about himself. So in Mann's case we throw out his "sheltered" childhood, the size and pomp of his father's funeral, the ball at the Pringsheim house, "the full sunshine of public favor and regard", the "fatherly affection toward the new young world", the "not unprepared" reception of the Nobel prize—and find, beneath this solemn conceit which masks as a calm acceptance of what heaven has deigned to bestow, the intent to make us believe that Thomas Mann, in token of so many blessings, must be a darling of the gods, another Goethe.

Yes, it was the image of Goethe that betrayed our poor Aschenbach, who did not die in Venice but twenty years later received the punishment that he had foretold for himself—and in return for his craving for dignity. We have only to turn to the essay on "Goethe and Tolstoy" to find portrayed those "darlings of the gods", those gifted and aristocratic "children of nature" beside whom our limited, bourgeois Aschenbach, the symbolist who is in danger if he strays a foot out of bounds, has tried to creep. (As though to become like them by simulating their pride in birth and good fortune!) Goethe and Tolstoy! Who were born in possession of dignity and strove all their lives for something else.

GERALD SYKES

THE EARLY LIFE AND LETTERS OF CAVOUR, 1810-1848 *by A. J. White* (OXFORD. $5.00)

THE POLITICAL LIFE AND LETTERS OF CAVOUR, 1848-1861 *by A. J. White* (OXFORD. $5.00)

THESE volumes will impress both scholar and general reader as the product of ripe knowledge and comprehensive judgment. There is no slighting of historical forces, no insufficiency of information or interpretative ability. The work is beautifully organized, supported throughout by documentary evidence and by critical method. The human ele-

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ments in an unusually complex political movement are treated with artistry and without loss of literal truth. The narrative is indeed adequate to the career of one of the most important and significant of modern statesmen.

Cavour's youth and early manhood are represented as a period of deliberate preparation for statesmanship. From the days of his robust boyhood in military school and at court to his election as Deputy and admission to the Cabinet, he is impelled by ambitious purpose; a slightly unsteady and diffused purpose, at times, but one which reaches maturity with the man and thereafter never changes.

Born into a politically-minded though reactionary family, himself increasingly interested in contemporary events, hungry for knowledge necessary to possible control of these events, Cavour found primary intellectual nourishment in the fields of practical economics and political science. Nor was the nourishment merely intellectual. As a farmer, as administrator of family estates, as adviser on investments, and as a nobleman, there was opportunity for direct experience. Likewise, there was travel: Switzerland, France, England, Northern Italy—not alone for expansion of outlook, but for systematic exploration, veritable inventories of alien resources and latest methods of exploiting such resources. In Geneva, in Paris and London, this virile personality seeks and obtains all manner of contacts with political leaders, with bureaucratic officials, with factory owners, hospital administrators, bankers, landed proprietors—particularly landed proprietors.

Returning, ever refreshed by novelty, to his native Piedmont, Cavour applies what he has learned. He prospers. He proves his estimate of modernized agriculture. He carries his enthusiasm beyond agriculture to industry; beyond industry to railroads and shipping and banking; to the development of material wealth and social stability throughout his considerable sphere of influence.

It was this approach which made him the spokesman for a new age. There are few more striking episodes than the almost unanimous demand in Piedmont that Count Camillo Cavour be given a chance to exercise real power in the newly established parliament.

Cavour rose to the occasion. As a moderate Liberal, as a tactician of the first order, he gained ascendancy. He became Minister of Commerce, of Marine, of Finance. He united his own following with that of Ratazzi, head of the Left Center. The *connubio* thus effected gave Cavour control of Parliament. On November 5th, 1852, his first Premiership and the realization of modern Italy began.

Cavour's aggressive domestic policies, his bold diplomacy leading to the entrance of Piedmont into the Crimean War, the Congress of Paris and his forcing of the Italian question upon the amazed attention of Europe, his manipulation of Austria into a precarious and isolated position—were steps in the realization of a dream.

Dr. Whyte has made effective use of the new materials published by the Royal Commission. No more absorbing, no more vital and authentic record of Cavour's great career is likely to appear during this generation.

ARMAND BURKE

I REMEMBER *by Opie Read* (R. R. SMITH. $2.00)

OPIE READ, an erstwhile popular novelist, has contributed to contemporary literature a volume of autobiographic reminiscence. He was born in Gallatin, Tennessee, in 1852. His father was a carriage-maker and a stern, autocratic Baptist. Read very early succumbed to a longing for a more colorful environment than his home. Inspired by the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin, he served a brief apprenticeship to a printing establishment, and set out, as an itinerant journalist and typesetter, to see the world. Read belonged, pre-eminently, to the Jumping Frog tradi-

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tion in American journalism. His professional career was exceedingly chequered—riotous and drunken and sometimes hungry, adventurous and humorous, and curiously idealistic. His wanderings brought him into contact with many distinguished men of the day—with Henry Watterson, Carl Schurz, Mark Twain, Mark Hanna, Eugene Field, and a host of editors, politicians, and minor poets. The anecdotes which he has assembled about them are often novel and entertaining, but they have a faint air of having been too long hoarded, of having been worn by the elusive processes of memory into a too conventional mould.

ONE MAN'S GOLD *edited by Florence M. Christman* (WHITTLESEY HOUSE. $3.00)

THIS story of the California gold rush has been drawn from the letters and journals of Enos Christman, a printer's apprentice of West Chester, Pennsylvania, who shipped round the Horn for San Francisco in the summer of 1849. It follows closely upon the publication of two similar narratives—Franklin A. Buck's journal of a gold seeker, and *Wagons West*, an account of the overland trail compiled from the letters of Henry Page. Christman's account is less stirring than Page's, for there was an epic quality in the covered-wagon migration which was lacking in the passage by sea. In some respects it is less entertaining than Franklin Buck's, for Christman was not so observant or sophisticated.

Christman's passage round the Horn, however, was more eventful than most. He fell victim to an unscrupulous shipping company which took advantage of the gold fever to misrepresent its fare and accommodations. Christman, with a hundred others, was starved and cheated and kept on a cruelly short ration of water for seven hazardous and stormy months. His vivid account of the experience is related in his letters to his fiancée in West Chester. When Christman arrived in California he found that gold digging was considerably less profitable than printing, and the fact that he did, in a modest fashion, make his fortune, was due to the high prices which Californians were willing to pay for their newspapers. His letters have been condensed and edited here by his grand-daughter.

LUCY STONE *by Alice Stone Blackwell* (LITTLE, BROWN. $3.00)

ALICE STONE BLACKWELL, daughter of Lucy Stone, has written a biography of her distinguished mother, the heroic little New England woman who was a pioneer of woman's rights in America, and who did as much as any other single individual to secure woman suffrage and a more equable adjustment of the legislation governing women. The tone of the biography is naturally eulogistic, but the reader will feel in this circumstance neither prejudice nor over-emphasis. It would be hard for even the most dispassionate commentator to write otherwise than generously of Lucy Stone, the gentle, unassuming, indomitable woman who adhered so firmly and pleasantly to her principles, and who was first in so many causes—first woman in Massachusetts to take a college degree, first woman in her generation to make a profession of public speaking, first woman to insist upon retaining her maiden name in marriage, first woman to have incorporated in her marriage ceremony a provision for equality of property and guardianship rights as between husband and wife.

JOHN ELLIOTT: THE STORY OF AN ARTIST *by Maud Howe Elliott* (HOUGHTON MIFFLIN. $7.50)

ALTHOUGH this book must be definitely classed as a memoir rather than as a biography, it is seldom indeed that one finds a memoir written with so much color and authority. Maud Howe Elliott has set down

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here almost everything one might wish to know of her artist-husband, John Elliott. This is certainly true of the thirty-eight years of their life together, from 1887 to 1925. Of Elliott's early years, when he was settling upon a career and acquiring the necessary training, we might possibly desire a more complete account. The one Mrs. Elliott has given us here has assumed already, and perhaps not unnaturally, a legendary ring.

Even in the busiest years of his very busy life, John Elliott was a tireless correspondent. Besides almost daily letters to his wife, written during the prolonged periods when his work separated them, there are presented here fragments of his correspondence with many noted contemporaries—with his mother-in-law, Julia Ward Howe, with Henry James, Meredith, Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Morton Prince, Lady Katherine Thynne, and with Villegas, his teacher and lifelong friend. These letters have, of course, a great deal of interest by reason of their associations. But it is from the letters to his wife that we derive the most valuable picture of the man and the artist. Elliott discussed with her, not only his personal problems, but the manifold problems and struggles connected with his work, when he was engaged, for instance, in the planning and execution of his monumental design for the ceiling of the Boston Public Library, or again, when he was at work upon his Diana of the Tides for the National Museum at Washington. The candor and enthusiasm of his letters are very attractive. One day he is elated, confident that he has "knocked spots out of Guido Reni's ceiling"; the next day, in a fit of depression, his design looks "awfully like a lot of flies crawling about in a pot of marmalade".

The book itself, a beautiful edition limited to one thousand copies, is lavishly illustrated with reproductions of the portraits and murals which established John Elliott's fame, with suggestions and unfinished sketches from his note-books, with numerous photographs and caricatures, and with eight attractive pastel drawings which Elliott executed as illustrations for Isabel Anderson's book of fairy tales, *The Great Sea Horse.*

MARGARET WALLACE

THE AGE OF HATE: ANDREW JOHNSON AND THE RADICALS *by George Fort Milton* (COWARD-MCCANN. $5.00)

FORTUNATELY situated at Chattanooga, in Tennessee, Mr. Milton, as head of the *News*, has been able to discover much hitherto unused material in joining the now considerable procession of those historians who are endeavoring to clear up the fame of the most luckless President of these United States. That Johnson was viciously slandered has long been apparent, and while he will probably continue to be denied his just place in American politics because he fell between the radical republicans of the North and the democratic oligarchy which these men expected would re-habilitate itself in the South, there is much due him as a patriotic American who stood by the Union to the damage of his own repute. Mr. Milton gives a most careful study of the efforts of partisans in the Senate to impeach Johnson, which failed because a handful of men in its membership were too lofty-minded to be used in what was a disgraceful and unwarranted political procedure. The vote barely failed of the needed two-thirds. It is a grievous tale as the author tells it—a pitiful comment upon times and men. Of all the wicked charges against Lincoln's successor the one that impugned his loyalty to the land for which he had sacrificed so much, was the worst. Certainly no implication was ever proven against him: he could and did obey his oath of office. Shortly before his death he had said: "When I die, I desire no better winding sheet than the Stars and Stripes, and no softer pillow than the Constitution of my country". Both wishes were carried out. It is no light task to brush away so much political débris; to dispose of

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so much falsehood. Mr. Milton has performed his task well. His book is a real contribution to American history, even though the chronicle is one the country ought to be ashamed of. The volume vindicates the inscription on Johnson's monument: "His faith in the people never wavered". Would that as much might have been said of their faith in him!

THOMAS B. REED *by William A. Robinson* (DODD, MEAD. $5.00)

MR. REED has been done before, by his loving colleague, the late Samuel W. McCall, of Massachusetts, but Mr. Robinson thinks much was omitted. In this book he certainly adds nothing to the late speaker's height. This would at the best be a difficult task. Mr. Reed hated hypocrisy and yet elected to be a partisan Republican, with the result that he was perpetually unhappy and found relief in a bitterness that blocked his path to greatness. Down in Maine they speak of a man's "hating himself" and so producing a form of morbidity; this was always in evidence. Detesting Presidents Harrison and McKinley, he was *persona non grata* at the White House. He was indeed "Briacriu of the bitter tongue", to borrow one of Lady Gregory's heroes. Thus it was that he failed to win either outside following or inside support for his Presidential ambitions, and was finally "let out" by Mark Hanna to end his days in the employ of the New York life insurance companies, of whose iniquities exposed, it may be certain he had no intimation.

DON C. SEITZ

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POETRY

THE UNCELESTIAL CITY *by Humbert Wolfe* (KNOPF. $3.00)

THIS is a book to perplex the hardiest reviewer. How to give a fair impression of a poem so vivid and versatile in execution and yet so feeble in total conception? Fortunately, Mr. Gerald Gould comes to the rescue by asserting, on the dust-cover, that *The Uncelestial City* is "not merely a great poem but a great social document". One remembers thinking that a temporary interdict upon the adjective "great" would be highly beneficial to our criticism of contemporary writing, but this misuse of it is helpful in naming one of the things that Mr. Wolfe's bewildering poem certainly is not. Witty it is, and tender, angry, sentimental, disgusted and startlingly beautiful by turns, but something far more than the sum of the author's extraordinary gifts and attainments is necessary to greatness.

The poem must be tested as satire—a thing we desperately need. But great satire is born of conviction and faith. Its shadows are darkened against some imagined light and its deeps are measured by some ideal elevation. The small satirist—and most are small—tries to do without faith. He shoots not so much to kill as to practise his marksmanship. So in this poem, where there is a steady banging out of both barrels at Church, State, Press, Schools, Politics, and Business—at everything, in short, that maketh a law—the reader is constantly astonished at the skill displayed but finally comes almost to pity the victims. No sufficient reason emerges why they should die.

Mr. Wolfe is against them all because he thinks they are all against warm sympathetic emotion. In Falstaff's phrase, "they hate us youth". The hero of the confused story abandons poetry for a career in the law, in the course of which he condemns a prostitute for soliciting and passes sentence of death upon a murderer for killing the husband of his mistress. Such are the stages of his decline from the liberal enthusiasms of his youth, in which he would probably have pardoned both of these offenders against the conventions, and we are expected to regard the whole process as a steady coarsening of the man. But what is the essential quality of the "youth" from which Crayfish falls away? Unchecked natural impulse and passion. Two important ingredients of it seem to be fornication and homicide, sweetly mingled with nightingales and skylarks, and whatever tends to put a check upon these normal impulses of youth is regarded as merely middle-aged, obstructive and damnable.

This, of course, is sentimentalism of the most hackneyed kind, and the very antithesis of the satiric spirit. In healthier times than ours satire would have slain it, but here it is intended to provoke not ridicule but tears. There is much hard and shallow laughter in this witty book, but from end to end of it we do not once hear the large hearty laughter of common sense. What we do hear is a rapid fire of wit, unerring and tireless and swift. Again and again, as one reads, the breath catches with delight at the sheer beauty of phrase, of image, of sound. There are passages, such as the London prostitute's blundering call at heaven's gate, of such scalding pathos that one would scarcely dare to read them aloud in public.

Inevitably one thinks of Heinrich Heine—another expansive and voluble and rootless

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mind, recklessly liberal, squandering wealth not his and loosening stones in structures he and men of his kind have done nothing to build, gifted with almost every power of seduction that a poet can have, yet falling short of self-mastery and far short of wisdom. Poets of this sort are to be taken very seriously indeed—as Plato took them seriously in the *Republic*.

One is glad that *The Uncelestial City* is being read, and not only because it is for the most part highly readable and entertaining—in spite of numerous defects in structure and an unsatisfactory conclusion—but because it provides vigorous exercise for the critical faculty. There is useful literary experience in the discovery that although the poem is often amazingly brilliant in the execution of details it is intellectually chaotic and morally immature.

THE GATES OF THE COMPASS *by Robert Hillyer* (VIKING. $2.00)

THIS is the eighth of Robert Hillyer's books of verse. Even those who know his *Five Books of Youth* and the sumptuous "Prothalamion" in *The Seventh Hill* must reckon the title-poem in the present volume his finest performance. It has both youth and maturity, grace and strength, wonder and wisdom. Technically considered, the blank verse in it is a triumph. It leaps and lingers; it quivers as a living thing, yet it is an instrument mastered—and used, not exhibited.

A characteristic almost peculiar to Robert Hillyer among contemporary poets is that he presses on steadily toward perfection as his goal. In this respect, among others, he is quite unromantic. Good sense in criticism and reverence for the traditions of his art have kept him from the current infantilism of verse and from any delight in stammering when he ought to sing. He grows, by roots that strike deep, and what poets learned many centuries ago is still green fibre in him. When he writes a sonnet we recall that Shakespeare used this instrument, and the music of his longer poems, such as "The Gates of the Compass", is enriched with harmonies from Spenser and beyond.

Not to make too much of Robert Hillyer's traditionism, for he is often entirely modern in topic and mood, nothing more important can be said of his poetry than that it does not ooze from a ditch just dug for a water-main but flows down out of intricate mountain ranges of time—maintaining its freshness and novelty, as a brook does, while concerned with no such matter. Coming from so far, it brings with it certain faiths and implications that seem novel merely because they are so old. One can make out from the "Phi Beta Kappa Ode" in this volume, for example, that the America of Hillyer's aspiration is still very dim in the west, and that among historic polities he would perhaps choose the feudalistic state, man-sized and manageable by use and wont. But this does not lead to a romantic nostalgia, for Hillyer's deeper faith is Platonistic and he lives in a country of the mind without chronology—a country in which whatever has been or will be now is.

A more remarkable trait of tradition in "The Gates of the Compass" is its pervading dualism. Two notes sounding as a minor third echo through all nature and history and thought, known to us as flesh and spirit, death and life, male and female, lust and love, time and eternity, despair and exultation, struggle and peace. And the meaning and triumph of experience, the poem seems to say, is not in the silencing of either note, in the denial of either term, but in sounding them together as a harmony—necessarily plaintive. (Yet there are passages that rephrase Tennyson's "Let the ape and tiger die", and more than once it is suggested that the only way for us to make our peace with nature is to conquer it utterly.)

Robert Hillyer writes out of an assurance in our final victory so strong that he can afford and endure keen disgust for the pres-

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ent. It is only from a mind at peace that we get verse so final and sure, so much as though carved on marble, as some of his. As thus:

By many paths we reach the single goal,
And all our quarrels deal but with its name;
There is no soul so different from my soul
As in its essence to be not the same.

That quatrain has none of the still ecstasy characteristic of Hillyer's poetry at its best, and it may be no nearer to pure poetry than "the best words in the best order" can go unaided, but it is manifestly written in what was once called "the grand manner". It is the expression of a mind that has kept good company, is not narrowly contemporaneous or local, and is therefore confident about a few fundamental things. It has "the peace of certainty". Although there is much disillusionment in this book and even some weariness and disgust, we are made to see that these moods answer only to the surface of life which changes with the years. Underneath, not to say it piously, are the everlasting arms.

ODELL SHEPARD

HIDDEN FLAME *by Bunichi Kagawa* (HALF MOON PRESS. $2.00)

THIS is a collection of poems by a young Japanese now living in California. It is his first work in English, although he has already achieved something of a reputation for his poetry in Japanese, and it is also, probably, as Mr. Winters suggests in his foreword, "the first collection of English poems by a Japanese that . . . has endeavored to stand on its own merits as poetry rather than as an illustration of a foreign state of mind". The special Japanese contribution, I feel—for this is not an occidental poetry—lies in the great humility and gentleness with which Mr. Kagawa approaches his art.

As a poet he moves slowly, weighted by a slight clumsiness which proceeds from his working in a language not originally his own, and his preoccupation is with themes neither regional nor national—the metaphysical puzzle of identity, most frequently. The poems continue through a floating, introspective mood born of the natural intellectual loneliness of a man lost between two cultures. Nevertheless, in spite of their occasional linguistic awkwardness and their limitations of mood, many of these poems are completely achieved, and, to my mind, extremely beautiful. They should give great pleasure to those who might find the leisure really to read them.

The general slowness of Mr. Kagawa's method makes it unfair to quote less than an entire poem. I offer one of the most characteristic:

When star after star rises slowly
Like rising mist from the dewy earth,
And stirs upon the point of my pointing
Bone that is clay, I am sleepless
As the shadowy unrest of a tree
That offends the darkness of night.

Can I break this? can my frozen eyes
Sweep this way? I say, what height
Shall be mine when the lucid silence
Of stars above bends and wets my upturned
Face, my upturned face that is neither
Too small nor too large to live or die?

Ah, let my vision be the tall leafy silence
Of a tree that climbs the night, and be lost
In the mid-air like a river, a river
Sleep-colored, that flows toward the sky!

A word should be said for the format, which is distinguished without being obtrusively artistic.

JANET LEWIS

CHELSEA ROOMING HOUSE *by Horace Gregory* (COVICE-FRIEDE. $2.00)

THE objects that meet one's eye in Mr. Gregory's *Chelsea Rooming House* are not objects common in poetry; they are instead the objects that invite the mind in a world of sordid and violent commonplaces. It is to Mr. Gregory's credit that they do not remain mere unpleasant objects, but are, some-

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how, embedded within the stern body of his verse and made to harden its texture. Ornamentation would be completely out of place in verse of this nature, and only the simplest figures can color its surface. The author cannot depend upon some elaborate metaphor for intensifying his poems, he must depend upon the stress and strain exerted by each individual word. One false word, and the whole structure would collapse into sentimentality.

In general what is so admirable about Mr. Gregory's poetry is this ability to give immediacy and positiveness to a theme, whatever necessity may impose itself within the subject matter. It is hardly fair to the volume to say that its only preoccupation is with mean manners of living. Poems like "Flora" or "Love Song: Twenty-Third Street" are as genuine in their emotional qualities as any in the book; they are quieter, their manner is more subdued. But these poems are equally free of ornament. Their effect is completed by a precision of language whose meaning corresponds very definitely to the immediate thing, person or emotion, and only vaguely to a picture or image.

EUGENE ARMFIELD

KING'S DAUGHTER *by V. Sackville-West* (DOUBLEDAY, DORAN. $1.00)

We have had little reason in the past for any great enthusiasm about Miss Sackville-West's lyric poetry; it has had only such charm and delicacy and easiness of music as we might expect from a person so skilful with words as she is. And the majority of these new lyrics are little better than fanciful arguments with ingenious conclusions, in the lyric form but most incompletely of the lyric mood. Nevertheless we would recommend this volume to anyone who is interested in this poet's work, because there are two exceptions—one lyric and one sonnet—which, being actually and not accidentally of the imagination, seem to indicate that Miss Sackville-West, as poet, has definitely increased in stature since she wrote *The Land*.

GEORGE DANGERFIELD

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ESSAYS AND CRITICISM

THE NEW AMERICAN LITERATURE
by Fred Lewis Pattee (CENTURY. $3.50)

IN *The New American Literature,* Professor Pattee, author of the standard *History of American Literature Since 1870,* surveys the period from 1890 to 1930, a period which he aptly calls "The Age of Growing Disillusion", although he himself seems to retain a romantic faith in our Manifest Destiny. "These ten thousand prairie towns have sprung up," he remarks apropos of the attacks of Sinclair Lewis, "with millions of acres of prosperous wheat and corn, from utter wilderness—roamed, within the memory of men still living, only by buffaloes and warring Indians and frontiersmen as wild. Culture and Victorian manners and esthetic-ism do not come to the border in a single generation. And what land in all the world has less of poverty and suffering and oppression?" The survey proceeds partly on the basis of literary types—the novel, short story, poetry, the essay—and partly on the basis of individuals. Separate chapters are devoted to Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, Jack London, O. Henry, Dreiser, and Mencken. The longest chapter is devoted to the revaluation of Herman Melville, and the best, I think, is that on Jack London and the manner in which "the Nietzschean doctrine of the omnipotence of force" charged the atmosphere for the explosion of the World War. Devotees of the Little Theatre Movement and contemporary drama will be surprised to find the drama omitted in this survey; O'Neill's name does not appear even in the index. Yet one would have supposed that as a naturalist and a pessimistic determinist, O'Neill would have been a valuable spokesman of contemporary philosophy, for, as the sympathetic Professor T. K. Whipple concludes, O'Neill sees man "as a subordinate part of nature, the sport of incomprehensible and meaningless natural forces within and without himself, a passive and helpless victim who can only suffer and vainly struggle in the grip of powers which he cannot understand, let alone cope with. . . . He shows man as undergoing an inner defeat. . . . His favorite topic is the degradation and disintegration of character". The presence of our master-dramatist, however, could merely have deepened the gloom of this dismal record of a naturalistic "liberation" crowned by a supine acceptance of bondage to environment and instinct the most stultifying the world has ever known. One shudders to think what a nightmare this record of forty years of American life would have been, if treated by a historian with spirit less radiant than Professor Pattee's. For he is master of a facile and entertainingly journalistic style, and he renders contagious his exuberant appreciation of the picturesque, the thrilling, and the romantic. Indeed, one may say that he is at his best when dealing with narrative distinguished for its surface brilliance, for flash and drive and color; he is at his worst when dealing with ideas, especially critical ideas. The chapters, or rather the few pages, on criticism seem to me most inadequate; fortunately, however, anyone interested in the subject can have recourse to Professor Foerster's incisive analysis of late American criticism in the book *Toward Standards.* Some readers will be amazed to find Mr. Pattee concluding that for a decade Mr. Mencken "was the leading American critic". Although it would seem that,

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regardless of his sympathies, a historian should be devoted to the exposition of seminal doctrines and influences, after Mr. Pattee devotes seventeen pages to Mencken, he devotes two pages to the twenty volumes of Paul Elmer More and one paragraph to the work of Irving Babbitt, dismissing them as "dwellers in the past" and exponents of a "negative philosophy".

Like such critics as Bourne, Van Wyck Brooks, and Mumford, Mr. Pattee strives to glorify a unique national literature; like such partisan historians as Vernon Parrington and Mrs. Lucy Hazard, he is grossly unfair to the "New Englandism" of such earlier writers as Lowell (who is summed up as "a parlor poet, a maker of puns and exquisite brilliances, of stylistic critiques, smart and cocksure") and he sees everything of value as springing from the Golden West: "The original creations of American literature, our *American* classics, with exceptions [illegible] been extra-New England in origin". As Mr. Pattee explains in his Preface—

> The volume is built upon the general thesis that the thirty or forty years since the 1890 decade constitute a distinct and well-rounded period in American history, that literature during this single generation of marvelous change departed so widely from all that had gone before that it stands alone and unique, that the soul of it and the driving power of it were born in the new areas beyond the Alleghenies.

At first glance, the thesis appears self-evident: what could be more American, more surely "beyond the Alleghenies"—to cite but two illustrations—than the work of men like Eggleston and Garland, dealing with the raw life each knew so well in Indiana and Iowa? If we examine the facts, however, we find that the first prefaced *The Hoosier School-Master* as follows:

> It chanced that in 1871 Taine's lectures on *Art in the Netherlands* . . . fell into my hands. . . . These discourses are little else than an elucidation of the thesis that the artist of originality will work courageously with the materials he finds in his own environment. . . . Under the spur of Taine's argument, I now proceeded to write a short story wholly in the dialect spoken in my childhood by rustics on the north side of the Ohio River. This tale I called *The Hoosier School-Master*.

And the author of *A Son of the Middle Border* recorded how, while preparing for his great work in a Dakota grocery store, he

> . . . determined to go to the bottom of the laws which govern literary development, and so with an unexpurgated volume of Taine, . . . a set of Chambers's *Encyclopedia of English Literature,* and a volume of Greene's *History of the English People*, I set to work to base myself profoundly in the principles which govern a nation's self-expression. . . . Day after day I bent to this task, pondering all the great Frenchman had to say of *race, environment,* and *momentum* and on the walls of the cabin I mapped out in chalk the various periods of English society as he had indicated them.

Shortly after, Garland formulated his "great principle" underlying "a really vital and original literature": "American literature, in order to be great, must be national, and in order to be national, must deal with conditions peculiar to our own land and climate". These are but two illustrations, of course, but they suggest the question as to whether the "spur"—to use Eggleston's phrase—behind this later literature derived any more from "beyond the Alleghenies" than from Europe. In other words, when this period is visualized in *international* perspective, what appears to be so unique and new and divorced from Europe is in part at least but an example of the outworking of eighteenth-century European doctrines, such as that, for instance, of "original genius" which was translated by the Europe of the nineteenth century (by Fichte, Herder, Taine, and others) into national and literary terms. Ultimately, the problem is raised as to the growing confusion between literature which as a photograph of local reality approximates social history and literature which

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as an *imaginative selection* of reality aims to present a *portrait* of the unchanging aspects of normal humanity, transcending the limitations of time and place.

If Professor Pattee tends to visualize his problem in terms somewhat too narrow, it should be said at once that he does not ride his thesis too hard, that he does call attention to the reading of the authors treated. His book is in the main descriptive rather than critical, although there is abundant criticism of an impressionistic sort. As a handbook, surveying the facts, mapping new trials, listing bibliographies, describing the contents of books with general good taste, *The New American Literature* fills a very real need and will be eminently useful.

THE BEGINNINGS OF CRITICAL REALISM IN AMERICA, 1860-1920 (*Completed to 1900 only*), *Volume III of "Main Currents in American Thought" by Vernon Louis Parrington* (HARCOURT, BRACE. $4.00)

BOTH as a study of its subject and as a type of contemporary literary scholarship, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920* (completed to 1900 only), by the late Vernon Louis Parrington, is worthy of the closest scrutiny. The present volume, incomplete but pieced out with lecture notes and odd essays on Sinclair Lewis, Cabell, and Rölvaag, is the sequel to Mr. Parrington's first two volumes on *Main Currents in American Thought*, which traced "the genesis and development in American letters of certain germinal ideas", following "the broad path of our political, economic, and social" history and considering the results of transplanting to American soil "the bequests successively of English Independency, of French romantic theory, of the industrial revolution and *laissez-faire*, of nineteenth-century science, and of Continental theories of collectivism". With the reservations to be mentioned shortly, one may say at once that this conclusion of an epic work presents a fairly accurate pattern of later American thought; that it is a book which no serious student of the subject can afford to ignore; that it is vastly stimulating, even in its weaknesses; and that it is written in a distinctive style—crisp, athletic, spirited, occasionally dramatic, and rich in epithet. Even if the present volume is the least satisfactory of the three, many of its critical and biographical sketches are in themselves admirable. Convinced, reluctantly, that "the idea of beneficent progress, which was the flower of the doctrine of human perfectibility, came to be interpreted as material expansion with constantly augmenting profits", Mr. Parrington here deals with the interplay of two themes: "the industrialization of America under the leadership of the middle class, and the consequent rise of a critical attitude toward the ideals and handiwork of that class". The contents of the book are far too complex to summarize. After a sardonic account of the Gilded Age, an account of Aldrich, Whitman, and Mark Twain, and of the work of Carey and Walker in giving capitalism the support of economic theory, the author turns to "the beginnings of criticism" in such figures as Curtis, Godkin, H. H. Boyesen, the Adamses, Howells, and the Greenbackers and Populists of the Middle Border. So far as the effectiveness of the "criticism" is concerned, the book is the story of a losing fight; the manuscript ends appropriately with "The Darkening Skies of Letters". Whether or not one accepts the constructive program of the New Humanists, I do not see how he can read this book without being convinced that naturalism is bankrupt: "that way madness lies". For one of its most sympathetic devotees has written lovingly the history of "the final defeat of the traditional agrarianism", convinced, an ardent Jeffersonian as he is, that "the earlier democratic aspirations had somehow failed". Mr. Parrington is surely right in calling his "Chapter in

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American Liberalism" a "discouraging essay" and concluding that "the dreams of the social idealist who forecasts a glorious democratic future are about as substantial as moonshine". And yet Mr. Parrington illustrates the typical romantic conflict between the head and the heart; an incorrigible dreamer, he yearns fondly for a bygone day, clinging to the idea that "Jeffersonian democracy"—despite his clear-sighted history of its collapse—"still offers hope", and insisting that the figure of Whitman is "the greatest assuredly in our literature", while he sees "the Incomparable Mr. Cabell", with his flight from reality and his nostalgia for Nowhere, as the creator of "great literature", "a self-reliant intellectual, rich in the spoils of all literatures, one of the great masters of English prose, the supreme comic spirit thus far granted us". Such is the consistency of one who pitilessly condemns Lowell and Aldrich and James as "genteel" and averse to the "unpleasant".

If such is Mr. Parrington's theme and if his book has the real merits I have tried to indicate, one's judgment of it is apt to be much more severe when he turns to consider the approach and the underlying assumptions as illustrative of trends in contemporary literary scholarship. In the first place, the author condemns New England scholarship for narrowness and partiality, proudly announcing that he is "liberal rather than conservative, Jeffersonian rather than Federalistic". We soon perceive, however, that, with the curious irony which haunts the naturalist, this liberal is really most illiberal and narrowly prejudiced toward Federalism, toward "the organized mob that called itself the Republican party", toward bishops "and suchlike spawn of the devil", toward tradition and culture, toward New England, toward the judiciary and the Constitution, and especially toward industrialism and capitalism. Indeed, capitalistic industrialism, as the menace of Jeffersonian agrarianism, is to Mr. Parrington what the Devil was to a Puritan, while "the program of the Enlightenment—freedom, individuality, humanitarianism, democracy"—is the will of God. It would seem unlikely, then, that such a conspicuous absence of the judicial approach will render the book deeply respected by scholarly and judicial historians. Furthermore, biased as the book is in point of view, one wonders whether Mr. Parrington's tendency to rely on secondary evidence —upon criticism and biography by other scholars rather than a first-hand analysis of *all* the primary evidence—may not multiply the chances of error and prejudice. Finally, as Mr. Eby indicates in his interesting introduction, Mr. Parrington was a conscious disciple of Taine, accepting his deterministic theory that the literature of a people is "the inevitable outgrowth of their racial peculiarities, environment, and epoch", a theory which minimizes such factors as personality and literary influence upon literature; in short, a theory which modern scholarship has seriously questioned. As in the case of Taine, one wonders whether Mr. Parrington's impression of brilliance, or clarity of pattern, is not partly the result of imposing on the facts a deductive and abstract formula which does not always take account of conflicting evidence. This sophisticated revival of Taine's approach and his belief that "every living thing is held in the iron grasp of necessity" is strongly colored by Charles A. Beard's still more narrow belief in economic determinism. Surely Mr. Beard and his school have brought to light much valuable evidence, but a "liberal" ought not to disparage other evidence or slight intellectual or spiritual factors.

In the second place, important and stimulating as Mr. Parrington's interpretation is, it is significant as regards contemporary ideals of literary scholarship that many recognized authorities should have pronounced his work "by far the best history of American literature that has yet appeared", a verdict echoed by the Book-of-the-Month Club.

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It is characteristic, to cite but one example, that in a book dealing with "critical realism" in American literature the author should practically ignore literary ideals and critical theory, that Henry George—who "did more than any other man to spread through America a knowledge of the law of economic determinism"—is given six times as much space as Henry James. The latter is given a scant two pages out of over four hundred, and is rather bitterly derided by the defender of *Jurgen* and *Beyond Life* as representing "The Nostalgia of Culture". The central question which students of literature will have to face is this: have not many contemporary literary scholars, of whom Mr. Parrington is the most gifted spokesman, tended to confuse social history and literature? Everywhere, as a disciple of Taine, Mr. Parrington considers books on the basis of whether or not they represent the "honest voice" of their generation in dealing with local and ephemeral topics such as, for example, the Greenback issue. Whereas, to hazard a truism, genuine and enduring literature is measured by the extent to which it imaginatively reveals, in terms of beauty, the universal human law, transcending the ephemeral limits of time and place. James had his weaknesses, but he found "The Real Thing" not in a literal transcript of actual reality but in an imaginative re-creation of reality to produce the "illusion of a higher reality", relatively typical, normal, and representative. He was interested not in photographs of the eccentrics of *Winesburg, Ohio*, but in "The Portrait of a Lady". *King Lear* isn't worth much as a literal record of the economic and social aspects of the age of Elizabeth, but one would be surprised if the best history of English literature dismissed it in favor of an ephemeral economic tract. Indeed, this three-volume work tends to emphasize the need for an equally extensive study, *judicial* rather than liberal (which means illiberal toward contrary views), devoted to a consideration of American literature as *literature*, as an imaginative rendering in terms of beauty of the universal aspects of humanity, set against the experience of the ages, and conditioned by the American scene.

HARRY HAYDEN CLARK

THE APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE
by J. W. Mackail (OXFORD. $2.50)

THE six chapters which make up Professor Mackail's short introduction to the study of Shakespeare were originally delivered as the Lord Northcliffe Lectures at University College, London. Their modest purpose is to encourage the reading of Shakespeare and to indicate some of the beauties one should look for on first entering, or upon re-entering, the Shakespearian world. Professor Mackail, who has a long and noble record as a classical scholar, is addressing a popular audience; therefore he omits all scholastic jargon and avoids controversial questions. First he treats the decade of the comedies and that of the tragedies, passes on to the romances and apocrypha and the sonnets, and ends with a consideration of Shakespeare's artistry. He divides the histories interestingly into three types: the episodic chronicle-play such as *Henry VI*, the tragical history-play exemplified by *Richard III*, and the pageant as seen in *Henry V*. He also has an ingenious theory that *Troilus and Cressida* came as the by-product or backwash of *Hamlet*, and *Timon of Athens* as the by-product of *King Lear*, a conception which is at least supported by the usually accepted chronology, but there is little authority for his insistence that Shakespeare retouched others' plays. This enthusiastic series of lectures contains few faults, and certainly Professor Mackail's contention that the average man should carefully avoid the ever-growing mass of Shakespeare criticism and interpretation and read the plays himself is one that cannot be overemphasized—especially in university circles.

JUSTIN O'BRIEN

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THE DECLINE OF MERRY ENGLAND

by Storm Jameson (BOBBS-MERRILL. $3.00)

MISS STORM JAMESON interprets the word "merry" as it was once applied to England, as meaning "high-hearted"; her book is an effort to account for the decline of her country from its one-time high-hearted state to its cancerous present. She assigns the whole responsibility to Puritanism, which killed checks and disciplines, as well as interests and enthusiasms, and set up in their place a partnership of materialism and moral individualism which has since ruled England.

The novelty of her argument is neither in the virtues which she attributes to old England nor in the faults which she attributes to modern England. It is in her interpretation of Puritanism and her account of its results. For, as Miss Jameson sees it, Puritanism was not merely a movement within the Church but a major social revolution, the effects of which persisted after the Restoration and ploughed the ground for the Industrial Revolution. In general its effect was this: that it released the acquisitive and materialist traits which were already latent in the middle classes, and by lifting that class to power in England, conferred supreme authority upon its doctrines. In detail, its several effects were as follows: it deprived the Church of its right to regulate trade and of its influence upon the ethics of trade; in a word, hastened the separation of religion from life. By encouraging thrift and industry and by confusing hard labor with good works, it led people to concentrate upon money-getting. At the same time it all but destroyed the arts and recreations, which had formerly made money a means and not an end. And finally, it produced a condition of extreme individualism, which resembled spiritual anarchy more than it resembled Christianity.

Such are the principal evils which Miss Jameson, in a prolix and shapeless argument, assigns to the influence of English Puritanism. She assumes, of course, that one can account for major movements in history by isolating certain events and pronouncing them causes, and within her assumptions the argument is convincing. But if one recalls that the Roman state came to much the same end, and that materialism, a religion divorced from life, and a dark-brown culture exist in much the same degree in other European countries, to which, presumably, the effects of English Puritanism did not extend, one concludes that Miss Jameson has not searched deep enough for a cause.

FREDERICK DUPEE

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A VARIED SHELF

RATIONAL EVOLUTION *by Robert Briffault* (MACMILLAN. $3.50)

IN THIS volume, which is a revised edition of a work issued in 1919, Dr. Briffault presents a theory of civilization and social progress based on the development of reason. It is his contention that intelligence and its active expression as rationalism are the bases of all human achievement. To prove his argument for reason and the scepticism which is part of physical science, the author writes a running and very readable history of the main events in western civilization in an effort to show that on every hand it has been untrammelled reason which has produced great achievement. His immediate foe is religion in all its forms, and he does not hesitate to dismiss all the religious learning of the East with the sweeping statement that the Orient was priest-ridden and doomed to stagnation as a result.

Dr. Briffault's account of Greece and Rome, the Middle Ages, the Arabian influence on Europe, the Renaissance, and the modern period is shaped throughout by his disapproval of religion and of every mode of thought which is not rationalistic. For instance, he approves the Greek scepticism, but finds the real power of scientific thought "altogether alien to the Greek temperament". He ridicules the great Socratic ideal of "Know thyself", and says: "Man went about for centuries with Gnothi Seauton on his signet-ring, studying himself, studying humanity . . . to no purpose. And behold, the only real knowledge, the only illumination the only revelation which has come about himself, has come from that unpractical star-gazing and studying of beasts and plants". The author goes even further and declares with all the insolence of nineteenth-century scientific egotism that "What makes all the difference between fruitful, enduring science and mere loose scientific curiosity, is the quantitative as against the qualitative statement. . . ."

More than half of the book is devoted to this biased history of civilization, in which the constantly reiterated statement is that the methods of science were alien to the thought of these, and these, and these people. It is only in the eighteenth century that Dr. Briffault can see evidences of "real" scientific and rationalistic truth. The latter part of this book is a statement of the claims of progress "in social justice and in the conscience of mankind". Dr. Briffault does not believe that machines constitute progress; he does not believe that the individual moves forward at all; but he has unlimited faith in socialized progress; that is, in the moral improvement in the temper of an age, and he associates this improvement with the "social will" and with cold and sceptical reason.

Since Dr. Briffault believes that "progress is human evolution, and evolution is a biological process", he naturally considers "there never was an age so moral, in the strictest sense of the term, as the present one". In referring to men of the past, he says, "The turpitude of their acts was not an attribute of their personal depravity, but of the age in which they lived". Such is the "social progress" which Dr. Briffault identifies with rationalism. And it is not unexpected that he should fall in a paradox, which even Plato did not escape, of identifying factual knowledge with virtue.

The answer to Dr. Briffault's theory and

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philosophy of history lies in the argument that if social progress is something in which the individual has only a second-hand and reflected part, then the ideal of individual human happiness is a futile and worthless one. Moreover, if an inferior age like the Periclean could produce such personalities as the Greeks, why should a "superior" age like our own continue to manufacture little more than mediocrities? After all, the book is an interesting and competently written outlay of facts marshalled to prove a false thesis.

ALAN BURTON CLARKE

THE RUSSIAN EXPERIMENT *by Arthur Feiler* (HARCOURT, BRACE. $2.00)

As a fully informed, careful and objective discussion of the tremendous political and economic experiment now under way in Soviet Russia, this book takes immediate rank among the very best studies of Communism which have appeared in English. We are fortunate that it has been translated from the German. It gives us both a keen, analytic diagnosis of the aims and purpose of the Bolshevist high command, and a graphic picture of the worker and the peasant in the Communist State. The present status of Russia is carefully examined against the background of the old régime and with full recognition of the difficulties which any economic system would have to encounter under conditions growing out of war and revolution, yet it is a critical appraisal based on facts and not on propaganda.

Three points which Mr. Feiler makes in the course of his study are both important in themselves because their significance is rarely realized in this country, and because they are especially illustrative of his own complete lack of bias. In the first place what Bolshevism has so far achieved is neither Socialism nor Communism. The way is being prepared but the goal never seemed more distant and there is none to say whether it can ever be reached. "What actually exists in Russia today," we are told, "is State capitalism, with a widespread basis of private enterprise, but politically under the rule of the working class, or rather of the Communist Party."

In the second place we are reminded that every revolution "is a sublimely terrible experiment of history". It is neither good nor bad but both good and bad at the same time. Furthermore it is subject to growth and development which cannot be foreseen, and just as it is impossible to say whether the Bolshevists' goal of Communism can ever be reached, so is it impossible to say just what aspect Communism would assume should it be established. There are today too many contradictions and paradoxes in Russia to foresee even its immediate future.

And finally as a rejoinder to those who would be presumptuous enough in spite of this to give a categorical yes or no to the question of whether the Russian experiment can succeed, the author declares that "any such answer would in truth be a preconceived opinion derived not from a capacity for impartial judgment, but from the belief which was held at the outset".

It is from such bases that Mr. Feiler writes and his book may be recommended without qualification for everyone who wishes to read of Russia not for the substantiation of preconceived opinions but for impartial understanding.

FOSTER RHEA DULLES

THE POLISH HERITAGE OF JOSEPH CONRAD *by Gustav Morf* (R. R. SMITH. $2.50)

Doctor Morf is apparently an English Pole, for though writing for an English audience he shows a native's knowledge of Poland and Polish literature. He is thus in an excellent and rare position to examine Conrad's Polish heritage. Except for some dubious psycho-analytical theorizing he does an authoritative, scholarly piece of work, which will be a necessary reference for future students.

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The book begins disappointingly with a display of scholarly apparatus and minutiae regarding Conrad's ancestors; but these factual matters disposed of, Dr. Morf gets under way with a highly interesting and suggestive criticism of Conrad's works, following in general the thesis that he was far more influenced by things Polish than Western critics have realized. Since Dr. Morf speaks from intimate knowledge of the language and customs, and writes with praiseworthy scholarship, he carries conviction. We almost regret to see him dissipating much of the mystery that has made Conrad fascinating. For example, the motivation for his going to sea seems to Dr. Morf clear enough: the sea was a substitute for his thwarted ambition, as a young Polish noble, to be a soldier; it was a means of satisfying the romantic dreams engendered by his reading and environment. Though we could guess this from Jean-Aubry's life, Dr. Morf makes it seem certain.

Though Dr. Morf's main thesis is convincing, his elaborations carry him presently into a psycho-analytical criticism which is extremely neat and like most of such speculations fascinating, but far too pat to be entirely plausible. The author gives us at length Jung's description of the "introvert intuitive type", decides that Conrad was an intuitive introvert, and proceeds to apply the pattern to Conrad's works. He is highly successful; but the very perfection of the pattern's fit, in addition to our general scepticism about things psycho-analytical, makes us wonder whether the truth can be so simple.

Going further with his method, Dr. Morf takes up the clue that all Conrad's heroes "are more or less his doubles, and their fate is modelled on his own or on what he feared his own fate might be". Conrad had a "guilt-complex": he had deserted his fatherland, against the views of his people, to seek selfish adventure; and all his life he was trying subconsciously to justify his desertion. Hence his heroes suffer inner conflicts on points of honor and often expiate a breach of it through death. Hence, for example, Costaguana in *Nostromo* is really Poland, and Don Martin Decoud, the young Conrad. Before Dr. Morf finishes with this book we discover with amazement that it has as complete a symbolical meaning as a prophecy of Blake in the hands of a modern investigator. Similarly Lord Jim is Conrad himself as he feared he might be; and the whole romance is explicable by Freud's method of dream-analysis. Our author goes so far, indeed, as to say, for example, that Conrad had the *Patna* towed to port by a French gunboat in order to symbolize his wish that Poland (note the likeness of "Patna" and "Poland"!) might be saved by France.

Dr. Morf is conscientious in his scholarship, but after the manner of other scholars with a thesis, he is inclined before he finishes to see in everything Conrad wrote the influence of Poland and the "guilt-complex". An instance is his explanation of Peyrol, the Rover, in terms of Conrad's past. "The most important events of Peyrol's boyhood are reminiscent of Conrad's, but the Rover's character may be said to be derived at least as much from Nicholas Bobrowski's as from Conrad's own." After twenty years at sea, Conrad, Dr. Morf would have us believe, was more likely to model the character of an old sea-dog on his Polish uncle than on the actual seamen he had known. We are willing to admit that Poland played an important part in Conrad's art, and the sea less than has been thought; but this seems unreasonable.

After all, psycho-analytical speculations hug the lunatic fringe of literary criticism. Dr. Morf is on firmer ground in emphasizing certain general conclusions about Conrad which have already been made by others but not generally accepted. One is Conrad's loneliness, which finds expression in the themes, as Dr. Morf shows, and also in the subdued tone of nostalgia running through his works. Another is his strong

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ethical trend. Dr. Morf quotes Richard Curle: "In his whole conception of the universe, the ideas of order and duty took first place, and this gave to his outlook an austerity of vision which was philosophic rather than moral". "Conrad preaches with the ardour of a neophyte," Dr. Morf declares, ". . . the lesson of the greatness and pathos of human destiny." And the aphorism of Pilsudski, "*être vaincu et ne pas se soumettre est la vraie victoire*", he says, "forms the theme of his best works". Thus we find justification for our previous conclusion that Conrad was no mere romancer, that his nostalgia was not emotional indulgence but rather an honorable search for a spiritual home, that his heroism at times rises to tragic elevation, and that if he was a pessimist, as so many critics aver, he was a pessimist about the natural world but not about the human spirit. Such a pessimist was Sophocles—and Shakespeare.

ALAN REYNOLDS THOMPSON

EGIL'S SAGA *translated by E. R. Eddison* (MACMILLAN. $6.50)

THE introductory and terminal essays, the notes and even the index of this edition of the *Egla* are the work of a man with a great enthusiasm for his subject and for his own ideas, and a profound scorn for those who think differently. Perhaps some of this independence comes from the solitary nature of his position as an admirer of the sagas. For since the time of Morris, popular interest in these prose epics has suffered an abrupt decline.

At any rate Mr. Eddison's introduction is the most vigorous word that has recently been entered in their defence, as well as the clearest statement of the conditions which produced them. His rendering of the *Egla*, however, with its archaisms, its confusing ellipses, its un-English constructions, is almost anything but a translation. In fact in some places, notably in the versions of Egil's songs, it is unintelligible. The editor tries to justify his method by pointing on the one hand to the simple constructions and concrete language of the sagas, and on the other to the abstract language and latinized constructions of our own written speech. One is ready to admit that the condition of language today is unfavorable to the translation of primitive literature. One also admits that the translator of the sagas must to some extent select his words and simplify his manner, if he is not to travesty the originals. But to go the lengths that Eddison has gone, to use a verbal medium which is neither Icelandic nor English, nor any other known tongue, is all but to confess that the originals are untranslatable.

Yet despite the bizarre disguise in which it appears, this version of the *Egla* is worth reading, because no more adequate translation of the work exists. Unlike the *Njala*, with its vast and sturdy architecture, this saga is amorphous. It begins, superbly, with the efforts of a family of Vikings to maintain their independence against the aggressions of King Harald Fairhair, but shortly degenerates into a chronicle of the doings of Egil, the most ruthless of heroes. But, for the loss of unity and climactic structure, the reader is compensated by some interesting allusions to the early history of England, and by a host of striking incidents which for violence are without parallel in literature.

FREDERICK DUPEE

THE SECOND TWENTY YEARS AT HULL HOUSE *by Jane Addams* (MACMILLAN. $4.00)

WHAT Miss Addams has written in this volume is not so much a record of a second phase of that famous settlement house which she established over forty years ago in Chicago as her own memoirs for the period between 1909 and 1929. It is true that she has recounted the story of the mythical "Devil-Baby" who was supposed by superstitious

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immigrant women to be lodged at Hull House, that she has described the efforts of Hull House to humanize justice, to foster the play instinct, and otherwise to fulfil the function of a settlement; but for the most part she has related her own activities, both in and out of Chicago. It is not as a social worker that we see her most, but as a member of the old Progressive party, a suffragette, a pacifist. As everyone knows, she has been an active liberal. Her book is written in a reflective vein, reminiscential, conciliatory, and moderate. Doubtless because writing is only a lesser means of expression to her, not so much of her personality makes itself known in print as we should like to see; yet we are afforded glimpses into those traits of character which must have endeared her to her associates and her fellow-residents at Hull House.

If one may judge by her writing alone, it would seem that Miss Addams is preëminently a woman of action, who is at her best when dealing directly with tangible problems. Her generalizations are never so interesting as her recitations of fact. (Her description of Chicago liquor conditions puts our politicians to shame by its straightforwardness and grasp of the situation. This elderly woman understands every shade of the bootlegger's argot.) Whatever one's own position on the controversial matters which Miss Addams discusses, one leaves her book with an impression of what an extraordinary woman its author must be in the flesh.

GERALD SYKES

LITTLE AMERICA *by Richard E. Byrd* (PUTNAM. $5.00)

ADMIRAL BYRD'S Antarctic expedition was a manifestation of what seems to our contemporary eyes as the most outstanding attitude of our times. It was a concerted effort of typical men, modern equipment, with our usual efficiency and publicity, to explore the last hidden continent. It was not a stunt, for the flight over the pole, though it is the climax of the book, was but an incident of many months' patient and painstaking work. The expedition was costly and must achieve results in the scientific study of vast stretches of Antarctic territory that may yet be of value. The records of that phase will undoubtedly soon be published in some fat technical volumes.

One feels this modernity and change of emphasis particularly when Byrd's account is compared with the records of Andrée's trip or even Scott's last expedition. The romance is not here. We have instead success and information that may yet pay dividends. With that in view the trip was planned to the last detail and the most modern equipment feasible was provided. Dog sleds were used, it is true, but aërial photography plotted the route and radio directed it. However, this is all as it should be. There are enough thrills in the book to satisfy anyone. The men did not rush headlong into danger, but the Antarctic furnishes enough as a matter of course to keep a trip there from being a pleasure jaunt. And not even the comforts of a radio can compensate for blizzards. Admiral Byrd's fame as an explorer and scientist rests secure with his peers. He is fortunate in being a popular hero admired for his real qualities rather than for his legend. His book not only records a modern adventure. It definitely and by implication reveals the possibilities and attitude of the modern man. The publishers, who are evidently in some doubt in the matter, offer a series of prizes for the best essays on the value to the civilized world of the Byrd Antarctic Expedition.

PAUL ALLEN

THE REWARD OF PATRIOTISM *by Lucy Shelton Stewart* (NEALE. $3.50)

BLESS the ladies! How they love to keep the fires of patriotism, and alas, of hatred, burning! Miss Stewart, who lives 'way out in

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Illinois, would offset the activities of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in expanding their worship of heroes, by reminding them that the North furnished a fair supply of the article, though she makes her point mainly in denying the merits of those who are so dear to the Daughters in question. She even ventures to strip the gilt from the memory of Robert E. Lee. Much is revived that had better been forgotten, but Miss Stewart certainly provides provocation. What seems "to mad her most" is the sympathetic Southern attitude of the late William H. Taft and the complacent Calvin Coolidge, to both of whom she fails to give any credit for "breaking" the solid South—as was done politically in 1928. Stone Mountain coins from the former and honorary membership in the Daughters for the latter rile her. She refuses to believe that this is yet a common country. For that matter, neither do the Daughters. These things take time. Meanwhile it is only fair to say that Miss Stewart has done an admirable piece of research, revealing many things concerning the civil conflict that students and readers will find valuable and interesting.

DON C. SEITZ

LIFE IN COLLEGE *by Christian Gauss* (SCRIBNER'S. $2.50)

THIS is above all a book for parents. As Dean of the College at Princeton, its author has had abundant opportunity to witness their bewilderment before the intricacies of the modern educational machine; he has come to realize that their importance in the parent-student-college relationship has been too often neglected, that "parental unwisdom rather than youthful perversity" is many times the real cause of serious trouble which brings undergraduates to his office.

In *Life in College* Dean Gauss draws on his own experience to give these fathers and mothers a simple statement of actual conditions in the American college, to analyze by the case method some of the problems which face the undergraduate, and to point out frankly some parental mistakes which handicap their children. He warns parents against the democratic fallacy in the "rush to the colleges"; tells them how they can determine their son's fitness for higher education; reviews the most common causes for the high percentage of student failures before graduation; explodes the myth of "training for leadership"; shows how home troubles, divorce in particular, always influence the student's career for the worse; discusses various minor "parental foibles and faults" which hinder the boy's success during the four-year period. Finally he explains the idiosyncrasies of the modern undergraduate—his lack of class consciousness, his realistic outlook on the world, his famous "cynicism", his unromantic attitude toward sex, his "gang loyalty", his revolt against authority. To Dean Gauss this undergraduate is no mere unit in the scholastic process, but an individual, strangely normal and human. His frailties are those of his elders. However, "human nature under campus conditions seems capable of more generous responses than are generally evoked by our modern civilization". Faced by a rapidly changing world, the undergraduate is adapting himself far more successfully than his elders. The only distortion in Dean Gauss's picture of college life lies in his comparative neglect of the intellectual activity which is after all its true reason for existence. This limitation and a too optimistic acceptance of things as they are can be traced to his desire to avoid current pedagogical debate. He writes as an administrator rather than a teacher, as one better acquainted with men's colleges than with co-educational universities. His book is addressed to the layman rather than the professional educator, but the latter will enjoy its readable presentation and the fund of pertinent anecdote through which Dean Gauss illustrates his points.

JOHN KIMBALL SNYDER

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WAR LETTERS OF FALLEN ENGLISHMEN *edited by Laurence Housman* (DUTTON. $3.00)

HERE is a collection of letters written by English soldiers who died in the war. Very few are memorable in themselves, or display any intrinsic literary merit; and the volume as a whole is much more moving than any of the single items could have been. They were written by ordinary young men, most of them in their early twenties, who were living calmly, fearfully, or joyfully, in the presence of great danger. One letter describes the first Christmas in the trenches, when the common soldiers of both armies met between the lines to exchange gifts. Another recounts the merry occasion when two Irish soldiers leaped out of the trench to settle a private quarrel with fists, while both armies cheered. A few of the letters, like Julian Grenfell's, testify to the delight men sometimes felt in battle. Grenfell exclaims in a letter to his mother: "I adore War. It is like a big picnic without the objectlessness of a picnic. . . . Nobody grumbles at one for being dirty. I have only had my boots off once in the last ten days, and have only washed twice". Most of the letters reveal a hatred of war. Many of them, which were written and put aside to be sent to parents and relatives in the event of the writer's death, are pathetic in the extreme. Some of them printed here have so much the air of a betrayed confidence that the collection, on the whole, would be pleasanter reading if they had been omitted.

MARGARET WALLACE

HEBREW REBORN *by Shalom Spiegel* (MACMILLAN. $3.00)

THE Zionist movement, which has attracted continuous popular attention since the World War, has had, since its beginning, two main objectives. One has been the establishment of a Jewish political state that will offer a refuge and a homeland for at least a certain number of the oppressed Jews of eastern Europe and furnish the nucleus for the further expansion of a national unit. The other objective—and to many a purpose of larger significance—has been the revivification of the idea of Jewish homogeneity, an idea which is to serve as a magnet to the scattered people of the Dispersion and to draw them together as a spiritual entity.

This book of Shalom Spiegel's, a collection of addresses delivered under the auspices of The Society for the Advancement of Judaism in New York City, is not concerned with the political state as such, but is a contribution to the literature of what may be called cultural Zionism. It is a study of that interesting series of writers of the nineteenth and the present century, natives of various countries, who have used a revived Hebrew as a medium. Mr. Spiegel, an associate professor of Hebrew language and literature in the Jewish Institute of Religion, is an eloquent advocate of the value of the ancient language for contemporary expression. Indeed he at once confesses the title of his book a misnomer. Hebrew, he says, is not reborn, since it has never actually died. It is of course true that it has been used throughout the Dispersion as a language for learned writing and for esoteric disputation. Now, under the impetus of Zionism, it is receiving fresh impulses and, with the infiltration of new words coined for homely uses, is adapting itself to the living needs of a people.

How adequate or how lasting will be this revival of an ancient tongue, only the future can tell. Mr. Spiegel is right enough in his assertion that "language is more than language", that "with language lie concealed magic forces of nature and of blood, lees of instinct and culture, a heritage of emotions, habits of thought, traditions of taste, inheritance of will—the Imperative Past". But when he goes on to say that "Hebrew in Palestine has today the force of an accomplished fact, a fact in the soul and blood—the force of Nature", he is perhaps over enthusiastic. The modern world is a world of

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rapidly shifting cultures. This experiment of language renascence is still too young for so final a pronouncement.

But whatever its future, the revival of "a language heavy with ancient memories" has produced—or has been produced by—a provocative group of literary figures who are worth the attention of any of those who are interested in the literary currents of the age. From the period of Luzzatto, the father of modern Hebrew literature, born in Trieste in 1800, to that of the philologist Ben Jehuda, who died in Palestine in 1922, engrossed to the last in adapting Hebrew to the uses of his people, Mr. Spiegel presents an array of writers intriguing in their histories and in the diversity of their expression. There is the teacher, Krochmal, a Galician Socrates; the poet, Gordon, satirist of an unenlightened orthodoxy; Martin Buber, the expounder of Chasidism, that mystic cult which, though out of key with Jewish history and temperament, stirred the heart of a harassed folk with a strange and disturbing music of its own. There is Lilienblum, positivist, socialist and finally nationalist, whose psychologic career was typical of the latter half of the nineteenth century, the period when scientific thought and the idea of internationalism were luring the intellectuals with the mirage of assimilation. There is a study of Smolenskin, novelist and publicist, who fought the influence of Mendelssohn, the most important exponent of the assimilatory movement. There is Mendele, the novelist of the people, who wrote his stories of the poor and the rejected both in the older tongue and in Yiddish, the jargon of the folk. There is Ahad Ha'am, journalist and philosopher; Bialik, the popular poet; Berditchewski the militant, whose early stimulus was Nietzsche; Tchernichowski, whose genuinely creative art gives evidence of Greek as well as of Hebraic influences.

It is to be regretted that there is not more of this provocative material available in translation. Israel Zangwill, Professor Davidson, Maurice Samuels and Mr. Spiegel himself have given some excellent English renderings, but there is still much work in this field awaiting the literary adventurer. One hopes that Mr. Spiegel will apply his sound scholarship and feeling for literary values to further translations for the general reader of this interesting body of writings.

FLORENCE KIPER FRANK

ON THE MINOR PROPHECIES OF WILLIAM BLAKE *by Emily S. Hamblen* (DUTTON. $5.00)

WILLIAM BLAKE was no system-maker: he detested systems. To be consistent and logical seemed to him a blasphemy against Inspiration, Vision and the daughters of Beulah. He has given us, therefore, a notoriously difficult task in attempting to interpret his symbolism. Sometimes his references are so private and casual that we could find the key only by accident. He kicks a soldier out of his garden and puts him, by name, into an allegory. Without a knowledge of the biographical fact we should be quite at a loss to understand the reference.

Apart from such details, however, we have some good general guidance. The background of Blake's thought is set by the works of Swedenborg and Boehme, by speculative Freemasonry, the Kabbala, Illuminism and Astrology. Swedenborg, in especial, he could never escape. He was brought up in the atmosphere of Swedenborgianism. He fought against the restraints of that atmosphere, but he argued with Swedenborg in Swedenborgian terms. Swedenborg had prophesied that a new world epoch would begin in 1757. Blake was born in 1757; and he accepted Swedenborg's prophecy as his own annunciation. When Blake uses a word in a symbolic sense, it is generally profitable to turn up Swedenborg.

Miss Hamblen is aware of Blake's debt to Swedenborg and Boehme; but she shows no signs of having studied either. She con-

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tends that the symbolism of the Prophetic Books is almost entirely zodiacal and planetary; but she has obviously given only the most cursory attention to astrology. Rather than trace Blake's symbolism to its sources she prefers to draw comparisons from Nietzsche, Thoreau, Whitman and Ouspensky.

Her other main contribution to the task of interpreting the Prophetic Books is a series of arbitrary and impossible etymologies. Two examples must here stand for hundreds. "Solemn heave the Atlantic waves", writes Blake. Miss Hamblen comments, "Solemn, as Blake uses the word, taking over the idea from the Egyptian, if not the Hebrew wisdom, would seem to be made up of syllables for both sun and moon". Esau, she asserts means *the thing itself, e-sautou;* but how *e-sautou* can mean *the thing itself* or anything at all, she does not explain.

There is one suggestion of interest which Miss Hamblen makes. A story is told that at one time Blake proposed to add a concubine to his household. Miss Hamblen regards the tension between Blake and his wife at this period as crucial for his development. Her reading of the events is very probable. It seems to be original to herself; and if it were accepted it would help considerably towards understanding the problems amongst which much of Blake's work was conceived.

ALAN PORTER

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FLEDGLING FICTION

FIRST NOVELS—1931 MODEL

Ah, but fashions in fiction do not change thus overnight! Novels are not motor-cars to burst forth at the turn of the year, brave in new colors and lines, boasting eight-cylindered heroes where six have hitherto sufficed, or enticing the public with the allure of free-wheeling heroines. Body and engine, the novel stays much the same, from one year to the next, undergoing so gradual a metamorphosis that who's to say, at any particular moment, just how or when the change has come about?

Yet changes there have been, as one observes, now and again, when one puts down a book with the thought: "This could not have been written five years ago". I am not speaking now of the changing moral standards which have left their sometimes too-obvious mark on almost every novel one encounters, but of more subtle and perhaps more permanent alterations in the contemporary attitude toward human relations generally—alterations of which most of us are unaware until some book whose point of view we readily enough accept brings sharply to us a realization of a changed state of mind. I am thinking specifically of one new book in which the (to me distressing) thesis that men, whether husbands or lovers, are not much good, is advanced by the author and illustrated by the careers of her feminine characters.

Oh, come now, I hear you saying at this point, this is no new theme. But wait a bit. The inadequacy of the male is, I grant you, not a recent discovery. No man who numbers more than three women among his acquaintance but has heard it enunciated and elaborated many times; and no one who has ever read a book written by a woman can be wholly a stranger to the idea.

But in all books that I have encountered (and certainly in all conversations that I can recall) the male has been regarded with a tender contempt, rebellious sometimes but seldom wholly disapproving, never indifferent. I speak of a different attitude.

In that very competent book, *No Goodness in the Worm* (Harcourt, Brace. $2.50), Miss Gay Taylor strikes, it seems to me, a new note on the theme of sex antagonism. Writing with no hint of personal bitterness and with a conviction which is doubly effective because so unostentatious, she considers man as an obstacle to the free development of women. A biological necessity—obviously. An emotional necessity (for these are normal young women of which she writes)—regrettably, yes. But as one fit to play any part other than momentary in the lives of women, equipped to serve as friend or protector or even as purveyor of entertainment —never, by implication, is such a function ascribed to him.

Now, I have no intention of arguing the matter with Miss Taylor. Indeed, I hold no profound convictions on the subject, and it may be that she is quite correct. I merely record that in far too many years of haphazard reading I have not previously encountered just the point of view which Miss Taylor so ably expresses. I have read books written in bitterness against man; I have read books which were the product of defiance, or contempt, or pathological frigidity, but this springs from none of these. It is simply the work of one who, through her characters, views man dispassionately and

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finds him, on the whole, dispensable. And that, I take it, is score one for the novel of 1931.

The book is not, by the way, in any sense a tract. Considered apart from its implications, it is the story, vividly and intelligently written, of Valentine Spens and her attempt to find, in an existence complicated first by husband and later by lover, some semblance of order and felicity. It is a book marked by sensitive perceptions, by love scenes exquisite in their abandon, and by a faithful recording of sensations and of states of mind.

If our women novelists are finding men dispensable, their masculine colleagues are apparently not retaliating. At least women play an important part in the three novels by men which have come to me this month, and in one of them engender a malady of the mind which adds a pleasing note of novelty to the current fictional scene.

Before I comment upon the book in question, let me digress for a moment to protest against a habit which is taking a dangerous hold upon the minds of the younger intelligentsia. (Do they still use that term, I wonder?) I refer to the habit, which it seems to me is becoming increasingly prevalent, of employing the work of Lewis Carroll as an easy means of establishing an entente between author and reader. Ever since *Alice* was discovered to be a really Serious Work, far too many writers have echoed archly: "But it's the very best butter" with the assurance that thousands of hesitating readers would immediately exclaim, "Why, he's one of us!" and take the writer and his book to their bosoms. This is not right. I in my quiet way yield to no one in my admiration for Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, as mathematician, or as creator of immortal nonsense; but these Alician allusions pall upon me. So, when I opened *Unweave a Rainbow* by Edgar Johnson (Doubleday, Doran. $2.00) and discovered the White Knight lurking in the shadows, I knew that the butter could not be far off. I was not mistaken. Mr. Johnson's debt to Carroll in the first few not wholly fortunate chapters of his book is considerable, and is overshadowed only by the fact that the book bristles with quotations from a myriad of other sources which wide reading and a retentive memory have commandeered to his purpose. One wearies, too, of the too elaborate aphorisms, of the set floral pieces which constitute the conversation, and presumably the wit, of his characters.

But that would be an error. For suddenly the story comes to life. Suddenly the endless brittle conversations mellow, the straining for cleverness gives way to a felicity of expression which has been lacking, and the reader is ensnared in an illusion so skilfully created, so dexterously maintained, that one wonders if the beginning could have been so bungling as it seemed, or if instead it were simply a prelude, wisely chosen to furnish contrast to the main theme. As to this, I cannot say. But I do know that in all but the early part of the book, Mr. Johnson has done an amazingly difficult thing amazingly well. He deals with the most tenuous of substances, whose nature it would be unfair to divulge; he treats it with the right mixture of mockery and wonderment; and in doing so he makes it so real that one accepts the enchantment without shame at learning that it is false.

There is no element of enchantment in *The Death of Christopher* by John Sommerfield (Cape & Smith. $2.50) and a good deal of pretentiousness mingled with some downright excellent writing. The story is, says the blurb, "the Odyssey of Christopher, figure of bright youth", whose career, ended dramatically in the prologue, is thereafter traced by the author, apparently in an attempt to demonstrate that he was not worth grieving about. This is love's labor lost. Christopher travels about the world, posturing, embracing and (this is the author's word, not mine) unembracing various ladies, engaging in some jolly fights, and altogether living a life that should have been productive of enter-

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tainment but is somehow merely unedifying. It is difficult to say whether the story is seriously conceived or written in a spirit of mockery. In either case it does not come off.

Mr. Sommerfield's phrase "the cruelty of living" could with justice be applied to the career of Jimmie Nolan, whose story is impressively told in Louis Colman's *Lumber* (Little, Brown. $2.00). In this utterly unpretentious book we are given at once a convincing picture of the lumberman as a type and a detailed portrait of the individual with whom the book deals. Mr. Colman has not scamped his background, but it does not overshadow his leading character. Jimmie stands out, a pathetic child, a swaggering youth and finally a rebellious defeated workman, in sharp relief against the setting, lightly sketched but ominous, of the lumber camp and the mill. He is, one feels, a portrait from the life—common, alive, doomed to be vanquished, but never pitiful. Not only he, but Pearl his wife and Lilley the wanton have the touch of reality upon them. This is an honest book and a moving one, the more so because of the studied absence of sensationalism from it.

There is a type of novel which must be done with something approaching to perfection, else it fails utterly. Such a book is *The Crochet Woman,* by Ruth Manning-Sanders (Coward-McCann. $2.00), and I am glad to say that it does not fail. What a little triumph of characterization this Crochet Woman is, dealing witchcraft on the moor and in the village and working greater evil with her sowing of malice and fear and suspicion in the ears of all who come her way. And what a fellow is this Mounster whom she hates with so deadly a hatred, with his brag and gaiety and licentiousness. They are admirably done, these two, but no less so are some of the others in the tale; Robert, the good dairyman, happy in his unrequited love and at the last piously seductive; Ambrosine with her three teeth and quiet potations; they are people not quite of this world, yet somehow true. They move in a witch's dance to the piping of the Crochet Woman, treading a tangled measure that is at once ghostly and alluring, and with them move prim Alice and slovenly Betty, and Lucy, big with her ill-gotten child. And the reader, if he be one who has ever thrilled to an old wives' tale told in the darkness, will share their terrors and their ecstasies and their brief dark hatreds, and close the book with sorrow that so good a story must end.

Something of charm, something of pleasing naturalness and a slender story go to make up the book *Lisa* by Edith Young (Morrow. $2.00). It is well told; and yet, perhaps because of its slenderness, perhaps because of its consistent minor key, perhaps because in it emotion is distilled into something too rarefied to be communicated, the novel is of negligible interest. Love (of which tenors sing and psychologists debate) is, I suspect, even in novels, Not Enough; as a theme it needs the enrichment of alien elements.

Something of the same impression of inadequacy is derived from a far more substantial book, *Poor Faun* by Charlotte Arthur (Putnam. $2.00), in which the incorrigibly adolescent husband is pictured largely through the eyes of his wife and of his too devoted friends. Here, I think, reasons for the failure of the book are more readily discoverable. Mrs. Arthur has attempted the portrait of a man in whom boyish charm and irresponsibility conceal a venal selfishness, but she fails to endow him with the appealing qualities which alone would make him credible. In consequence, although she too tells her story well, although her other people are competently and naturally portrayed, although the incidents in the book are developed with impeccable logic, her story fails to convince. This failure is the more regrettable in that it is due to one vital defect in a story which in other respects displays a talent well above the average.

GUY HOLT

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THE BOOKMAN'S MONTHLY SCORE

COMPILED BY FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE, LIFE MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION, IN COÖPERATION WITH THE PUBLIC LIBRARIES OF AMERICA

Of the writing of books about Mrs. Eddy there is no end. And likewise of the reading of them. Whatever one's personal opinion of her doctrines, it must be conceded by everybody that she set forces in motion which show no sign of stopping. Whenever a book relating to her is published, it finds its way with unerring accuracy into this Monthly Score.

—F. P. S.

NOVELS

1. ANGEL PAVEMENT	*J. B. Priestley*	HARPERS
2. TWENTY-FOUR HOURS	*Louis Bromfield*	STOKES
3. SEED	*Charles G. Norris*	DOUBLEDAY, DORAN
4. THE DEEPENING STREAM	*Dorothy Canfield*	HARCOURT, BRACE
5. YEARS OF GRACE	*Margaret Ayer Barnes*	HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
6. PHILIPPA*	*Anne Douglas Sedgwick*	HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
7. CAKES AND ALE*	*W. Somerset Maugham*	DOUBLEDAY, DORAN
8. BLOWING CLEAR	*Joseph C. Lincoln*	APPLETON
9. LAUGHING BOY	*Oliver La Farge*	HOUGHTON MIFFLIN
10. WILD WIND	*Temple Bailey*	PENN
11. WATERS UNDER THE EARTH*	*Martha Ostenso*	DODD, MEAD
12. CIMARRON	*Edna Ferber*	DOUBLEDAY, DORAN

GENERAL

1. THE STORY OF SAN MICHELE	*Axel Munthe*	DUTTON
2. THE GREEN PASTURES	*Marc Connelly*	FARRAR & RINEHART
3. THE ADAMS FAMILY	*James Truslow Adams*	LITTLE, BROWN
4. LONE COWBOY	*Will James*	SCRIBNER'S
5. HUMANITY UPROOTED*	*Maurice Hindus*	CAPE & SMITH
6. THE CONQUEST OF HAPPINESS*	*Bertrand Russell*	LIVERIGHT
7. THE HUMAN MIND	*Karl Menninger*	KNOPF
8. BYRON	*André Maurois*	APPLETON
9. NEW WORLDS TO CONQUER	*Richard Halliburton*	BOBBS-MERRILL
10. GRANDMOTHER BROWN'S HUNDRED YEARS	*Harriet Connor Brown*	LITTLE, BROWN
11. ASTROLOGY: YOUR PLACE AMONG THE STARS	*Evangeline Adams*	DODD, MEAD
12. MARY BAKER EDDY*	*Lyman P. Powell*	MACMILLAN

This title has not previously appeared in the Monthly Score

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